

PATH TO PROTEST:
A HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPERIENCES
AND INFLUENCES THAT LED TO DIETRICH BONHOEFFER
PROTESTING THE AYRAN CLAUSE IN 1933

by

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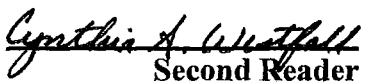
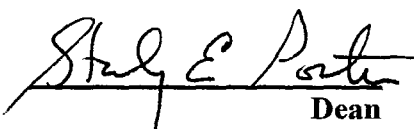
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Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German pastor and theologian involved with the Confessing church as part of the German church struggle in the 1930's. A central concern for Bonhoeffer was the Aryan clause that was introduced by the National Socialists and implemented by their supporters within the Protestant church. The Aryan clause was designed to remove anyone of Jewish heritage from the civil service, which affected the Protestant church since its pastors were paid by the state. Bonhoeffer rejected the Aryan clause due to the various influences and experiences leading up to 1933. These life experiences were rooted in Bonhoeffer's family life, his university years, his year in America, and in his vocational work in the years preceding the rise of National Socialism. These four epochs contain the key influences and experiences that enabled Bonhoeffer to resist the implementation of the Aryan clause within the German Protestant church in 1933.

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German pastor and theologian involved in the Confessing Church as part of the German church struggle and was later imprisoned and executed by the National Socialists for his involvement in an assassination plot against Adolf Hitler. A scion of an upper middle class German family, Bonhoeffer chose to leave the relative prosperity of his class and heritage to become a willing participant in the German Protestant church. Soon after his ordination, Bonhoeffer chose to protest the Aryan clause introduced by the National Socialists in 1933 that was designed to remove anyone of Jewish heritage from the civil service. This clause affected the church since pastors of the Protestant church were paid by the state.

What enabled Bonhoeffer in 1933 to protest the implementation of the Aryan clause within the Protestant church in Germany? This thesis seeks to discover what influences and experiences occurred in Bonhoeffer's life that resulted in him clearly and decisively rejecting the Aryan clause and its implementation into the Protestant church in 1933. It is the goal of this thesis to show that Bonhoeffer rejected the Aryan clause due to the various life experiences provided through his family background, his university years, his time in America, and his vocational efforts in the final years leading up to the National Socialists rise to power and their introduction of the Aryan clause in 1933.

Literature Review

Due to his death at the hands of the National Socialists in 1945, Bonhoeffer was not able to write an autobiography to explain his thought and actions. This is one of the reasons why Bonhoeffer studies are so broad and multifaceted and why the secondary sources are numerous. Initially, most of the scholarly work on Bonhoeffer surrounded his

unfinished theological and ethical concepts.¹ Interest in Bonhoeffer's theological and ethical work continues today,² and more biographical and historical work has been attempted to root Bonhoeffer within his context. The leading contributor to contemporary studies is Eberhard Bethge, who was Bonhoeffer's friend and student, and in later years biographer and leading interpreter. Bethge's biography, entitled *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, combines both concentrated scholarship and investigation with personal knowledge and memories that make the work unique.³ Even other Bonhoeffer biographies, such as Renate Wind's *A Spoke in the Wheel: The Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Elizabeth Raum's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Called by God* and Mary Bosanquet's *The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* are reliant upon Bethge's monumental work.⁴ Similarly, this work will use Bethge's biography as the primary source of biographical information about Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Bonhoeffer's rejection of the Aryan clause is often used as a starting point for many scholars in discussing Bonhoeffer's relationship with the Jews, since the Aryan clause was mainly directed towards Jewish civil servants. Although the Aryan clause may be a common starting point for those that discuss Bonhoeffer's relationship to the Jews,

¹ See Martin E. Marty, ed., *The Place of Bonhoeffer: Problems and Possibilities in his Thought* (New York: Association Press, 1964); Eberhard Bethge, "Turning Points in Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought," *Union Theological Quarterly Review* 23, 1 (1967): 141-155; Benjamin A. Reist, *The Promise of Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Co., 1969).

² See John W. De Gruchy, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Eberhard Bethge, *Friendship and Resistance: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Geneva: WCC, 1995); Ricard V. Pierard, "The Historical Importance of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *Fides and Historia* 29, 2 (1997): 5-10; Richard Weikart, "Who is Dietrich Bonhoeffer For Us Today?" *Fides and Historia* 29, 2 (1997): 12-25.

³ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

⁴ Mary Bosanquet, *The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1968); Elizabeth Raum, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Called by God* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2002); Ronald Gregor Smith and Wolf-Dieter Zimmerman, eds., *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Käthe Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966); Renate Wind, *A Spoke in the Wheel: The Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1991).

there is a wide range of opinion concerning the nature of that relationship. First, there are those that claim Bonhoeffer was not anti-Semitic.⁵ Second, there are those that view Bonhoeffer as not deliberately anti-Semitic, but his use of traditional Christian language shows some level of latent anti-Semitism.⁶ Third, there are those that see Bonhoeffer not being able to overcome his Christian heritage and that he expressed anti-Semitic thought.⁷ Although there are different views on how Bonhoeffer treated the Jews, those that have studied the topic do agree that in 1933 Bonhoeffer did reject the Aryan clause. This work will contribute to Bonhoeffer studies by focusing on Bonhoeffer's rejection of the Aryan clause as a result of various life experiences leading up to 1933.

Primary Sources

This thesis will rely heavily upon primary source material in order to bring to light the various life experiences that were instrumental in Dietrich Bonhoeffer rejecting the Aryan clause in 1933. In current Bonhoeffer scholarship the most important primary source material is *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, which are the authoritative and heavily annotated version of Bonhoeffer's major works and other miscellaneous writings.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works are based upon the seventeen volume German edition,

⁵ See Eberhard Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews," in *Ethical Responsibility: Bonhoeffer's Legacy to the Churches*, vol. 6 of Toronto Studies in Theology, Bonhoeffer Series, no. 1, ed. John D. Godsey and Geoffrey B. Kelly (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981); Alejandro Zorzon, "Church versus State: Human Rights, the Church, and the Jewish Question (1933)," in *Bonhoeffer for a New Day: Theology in a Time of Transition*, ed. John W. De Gruchy (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997).

⁶ See William Jay Peck, "From Cain to the Death Camps: An Essay on Bonhoeffer and Judaism," *Union Theological Seminary*, 2 (1973): 158-176; Larry Rasmussen, "The Ethics of Responsible Action," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ruth Zerner, "Church, State and 'the Jewish Question,'" in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ruth Zerner, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews, 1933-1945," *Jewish Social Studies*, XXXVII, 3-4 (1975): 235-250.

⁷ See Kenneth C. Barnes, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hitler's Persecution of the Jews," in *Betrayal: The German Christians and the Holocaust*, ed. Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); Emil L. Fackenheim, "On the Self-Exposure of Faith to the Modern-Secular World: Philosophical Reflections in the Light of Jewish Experience," *Daedalus* 96, 1 (1967): 193-219; Eva Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology since 1945* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1975).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke,⁸ but *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* are not yet a complete set, as only nine of sixteen volumes are available at this time.⁹ Fortunately, the ninth volume of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* entitled *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*¹⁰ provides key early writings which were not readily available in other English collections.

Although many of Bonhoeffer's major works, such as *The Cost of Discipleship*, *Life Together*, *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*, were written after 1933, they remain important in providing a larger context for Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life.¹¹ The primary source material relevant to this thesis is rooted in minor writings and other correspondence. Although *The Young Bonhoeffer* is the only epochal volume of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* available at this time, the other English collections, *No Rusty Swords*, *The Way to Freedom*, *True Patriotism* and *A Testament to Freedom* provide an English translation of the minor writings.¹² As well, some English translations are provided in the original German collection of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's writings, *Gesammelte Schriften*.¹³ This work will use English language sources as key writings

⁸Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, Vols. 1-17, ed. Eberhard Bethge et al. (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1986-1999).

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Vols. 1-16, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, ed. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

¹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, ed. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

¹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Fontana Library, 1970; Fontana Library, 1971); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *True Patriotism: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1939-1945 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden, Vol. 3 (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1973); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Way to Freedom: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1935-1939 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden, Vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelley and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990).

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1-6 (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1958).

have been translated from the German in the various collections listed above. The greatest limitations to this thesis will not be the use of English translations, but the fact that Bonhoeffer did not leave an autobiography and the loss and damage to documents that occurred during the Second World War. Fortunately, documents relevant to this thesis have survived and have been translated into English.

Methodology

The critical theory for this essay comes from Eberhard Bethge's essay on *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews*. Bethge suggests that in interpreting Bonhoeffer "one must consider the totality of the person."¹⁴ In other words, everything must be considered when interpreting Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This will be the approach in investigating Bonhoeffer's life leading up to and surrounding the events of 1933. It is due to this all encompassing methodology that an epochal framework will provide the structure in understanding Bonhoeffer's development in order to obtain a complete picture of the influences that provided the basis for Bonhoeffer's protest of the Aryan clause.

The main body of the thesis will have two main parts. The first part will discuss the major periods of Bonhoeffer's life leading up to the rise of the Nazi regime. The second part of the thesis will discuss Bonhoeffer's protest of the Aryan clause in 1933. The first part of the thesis will discuss Bonhoeffer's life experiences that caused him to protest the Aryan clause in the early years of the National Socialist regime. This comprehensive study of Bonhoeffer's life experiences will be divided into four major periods.

¹⁴ Eberhard Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews", in *Ethical Responsibility: Bonhoeffer's Legacy to the Churches*, edited by John D. Godsey and Geoffrey B. Kelly, Volume Six of Toronto Studies in Theology (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), 53.

The first chapter focuses on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's family background. The home of Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer provided their son with a strong familial environment that was shaped by the privileges of the professional middle class and with a strong moral grounding. In addition, Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer did not support radical political groups and did not support the National Socialists in their rise to power. As well, the Bonhoeffer family was not anti-Semitic and did not support the Aryan measures that were introduced in 1933.

The second chapter surrounds Bonhoeffer's student years and the events during this period that contributed to his rejection of the Aryan clause. It was during this time that Bonhoeffer avoided the right wing political impulses during his year in Tübingen with his involvement in a fraternity and in the military. As well, his university years provided Bonhoeffer with the opportunity to travel to Rome, where he experienced the universality of the church and developed a burgeoning awareness of the limits of his own German Protestantism. In addition, the era provided Bonhoeffer with his initial contact with the writings of Karl Barth and his reaction to the theological debate between liberal and dialectical theology, which helped Bonhoeffer move beyond German liberalism while retaining his independence from Karl Barth. Lastly, this time period provided the basis of Bonhoeffer's approach to the Old Testament that would embrace that the Old Testament was part of Scripture and authoritative, which led Bonhoeffer to reject the German Christian assertion that Old Testament could be removed from the church due to its Judaic elements.

The third chapter focuses on the time that Bonhoeffer spent in America while he studied at Union Theological Seminary. The first influence from his time in America was

his introduction to the social theology of North America, which influenced Bonhoeffer to become active in the social concerns of society upon his return to Germany. As well, Bonhoeffer became heavily involved in the community of Harlem and saw first hand the tragic effects of racism, which caused him to protest any attempt to introduce racist concepts that would affect the Protestant Church within Germany. During his time in America, Bonhoeffer was introduced to the concept of Christian pacifism by fellow student and Frenchman, Jean Lasserre, which caused Bonhoeffer to transcend the nationalistic views of many of German theologians and influenced Bonhoeffer to join the ecumenical movement.

The fourth chapter looks at Bonhoeffer's life in 1932 as he would serve in academic, ministerial and ecumenical realms. In the academic realm Bonhoeffer found himself moving away from his liberal theological background. It was during this time period that Bonhoeffer had the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with Karl Barth, as Barth would become an ally against the Aryan clause. As well, it was within this short time period that Bonhoeffer separated himself from his more liberal colleagues at the University of Berlin, and warned against the Protestant church becoming involved in party politics. During this period Bonhoeffer's ministerial endeavours saw him become involved in the lives of people that very much unlike him. The experiences of the Wedding confirmation class and the Charlottenburg youth club saw Bonhoeffer addressing social concerns and investing in the lives of people that were not of his own class. Also, it was during this period that Dietrich Bonhoeffer began addressing social and political issues in his sermons. The last area of involvement for Bonhoeffer during this time period was in the ecumenical realm. In the ecumenical realm Bonhoeffer began

to establish new contacts that aided him in his protest of the Aryan clause. In addition, Bonhoeffer would begin to dialogue with nationalistic theologians and reject the theology of the orders of creation, which was used to justify war and struggle between races. All four of these eras in Bonhoeffer's life would influence Bonhoeffer to reject that Aryan clause in 1933.

The second part of the paper focuses on Bonhoeffer's rejection of the Aryan clause in 1933. The fifth and final chapter describes Dietrich Bonhoeffer's protest of the Aryan clause in 1933 and how his life up to that point prepared him to do so. After the Aryan clause was introduced Bonhoeffer responded in his initial essay *The Church and the Jewish Question*.¹⁵ During the summer months of 1933 Bonhoeffer concentrated his efforts against the Aryan clause by resisting the German Christians¹⁶ ecclesiastical advances within the Protestant church, since the German Christians would gladly have implemented the Aryan clause in the Protestant church.¹⁷ Bonhoeffer's summer efforts culminated with his efforts in the Bethel Confession, which was written to confront the German Christians on a number of issues, including the Aryan clause. Finally, Bonhoeffer protested the acceptance of the Aryan clause by the Prussian and National synods in September 1933, which led to his involvement in forming of the Pastors' Emergency League and his efforts during the ecumenical conference at Sofia. Ultimately, the final result was defeat with acceptance of the Aryan clause into the Protestant church and Bonhoeffer's departure for London.

¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question," in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Fontana Library, 1970; Fontana Library, 1971).

¹⁶ Unless noted otherwise, the term "German Christians" will refer to the group within German Protestantism known as "Deutsche Christen"

¹⁷ Unless noted otherwise, the term "Protestant church" will refer to Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches within Germany. See Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (The University of North Carolina, 1996), 5.

CHAPTER ONE

FAMILY LIFE 1906-1923

The greatest and longest lasting influence upon Dietrich Bonhoeffer's entire life was that of his family. From the time of his birth until his death Bonhoeffer was intimately connected to his family and his family to him. Bonhoeffer was blessed with a distinguished heritage on both sides of his family, which culminated in the home of his parents, Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer grew up in a liberal humanitarian home that did not support anti-Semitism thought or action and did not support any ultra-right wing political ideologies, like those of the National Socialists. As a result of the experience of his family life, Bonhoeffer rejected the Aryan clause in 1933.

The Home of Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's ancestry was quietly rooted in German history. Mary Bosanquet writes, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's ancestors had fitted with an unobtrusive distinction into the jigsaw puzzle of German history."¹ The maternal side of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's family had an aristocratic background, while the paternal side was made of hard working professionals that were of the middle class.² Karl Bonhoeffer brought into his marriage the tradition of the professional middle class, which was conservative and honourable, and the willingness to open his home as a refuge and to serve his fellow citizens with a humanitarian conscience. Paula Bonhoeffer, née von Hase, brought to her marriage her cultured and humanitarian upbringing, as well as her own religious and

¹ Bosanquet, 17.

² Gerhard Leibholz writes, "His more remote ancestors were theologians, professors, lawyers, artists. From his mother's side there was also some aristocratic blood in his veins. See Gerhard Leibholz, "Memoir" in *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 13

educational beliefs, which she used in raising her children. It is through Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer that the family values and traditions would be introduced to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his siblings.

Karl Bonhoeffer was born 30 March 1868. He attended university at Tübingen as he started his degree in medicine. Due to his mother's insistence that neither of her sons enter the Prussian civil service or military, Karl Bonhoeffer decided to enter into medicine.³ He decided to pursue psychiatry as his field of expertise, and as a result he left Tübingen and moved to Breslau. He began his work as an assistant to Carl Wernike in 1893 in the city of Breslau.⁴ His initial study in Breslau was specializing in alcoholic psychosis, which was common due to the low standard of living of many of citizens of the city combined with a high level consumption of schnapps.⁵ This is a good example of the humanitarian impulses in his life, as working with such people in such dire circumstances clearly shows in Karl the concern that he had for his fellow humanity. This humanitarian concern would continue in his post-doctoral work. Karl Bonhoeffer rose quickly and did his post-doctoral work with Wernicke, which resulted in him being appointed as a psychiatrist in, as Bethge puts it, "the observation ward for mentally disturbed prisoners in Silesia; here he worked on degenerative psychoses."⁶ In the year preceding 1933 Dietrich Bonhoeffer served among the poorer members of society, as his father had many years earlier.

³ Karl Bonhoeffer writes in his memoirs that "This posed no difficulty for me, since I tended toward medicine from the beginning, once I had abandoned the idea of taking my regional examinations and entering a theological or philosophical career, because of my pronounced aversion to talking by myself every Sunday or becoming a teacher." Karl Bonhoeffer, *Lebenserinnerungen*, (photocopies made for the family, 1946-1948), 51f, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 13.

⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 13.

⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 13.

⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 14.

Although the medical work in Breslau was extremely demanding, it was in this city that Karl Bonhoeffer met his future wife, Paula von Hase, in 1896, and two years later they were married. Their first son, Karl-Friedrich, was born in 1899, followed by Walter in 1899 and Klaus in 1901. Ursula and Christine were born in 1902 and 1903. Dietrich and Sabine were twins born in 1906, and Susanne was born in 1909.⁷ Karl Bonhoeffer was able to instil in his children values of the liberal-humanitarian middle class, as he “embodied the Prussian virtues of the German cultural élite: a sense of duty, understatement, ‘being more than one appears’ ... In this and in many other respects the Bonhoeffers were typical of the lifestyle and sensibilities of the enlightened, conservative-liberal class of the time.”⁸ Karl Bonhoeffer also imparted many of his character traits to his children. Sabine Leibholz remembers that her father “showed his respect for warm-hearted, unselfish and disciplined actions and relied on us to stand by the weak.”⁹ These traits were exhibited by Bonhoeffer in his own life, especially the ability to stand by the weak, as he attempted to do by rejecting the Aryan clause in 1933.

When Paula von Hase married Karl Bonhoeffer, she brought with her aristocratic heritage, but at the same time distanced herself from the privileges that her heritage could have provided. In her youth Paula Bonhoeffer had “dissociated herself from her milieu. Instead of preparing for marriage in keeping with her status, she trained as a teacher and eventually married a middle class husband.”¹⁰ She was the manager of her household, but this does not mean that she was a domineering figure; instead it indicates that both Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer established a relationship that played to their own strengths, which

⁷ Raum, 16.

⁸ Wind, 3.

⁹ Sabine Leibholz, “Childhood and Home”, in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, eds. Ronald Gregor Smith and Wolf-Dieter Zimmerman, trans. by Käthe Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 13.

¹⁰ Wind, 1.

caused their marriage to last longer than fifty years.¹¹ Sabine Leibholz recalls that “Our mother had a strong personality. She was intelligent, warm-hearted and unaffected, a good organizer and socially very gifted.”¹² Paula Bonhoeffer taught all of her children at home for the first years of their education, which led to all of them excelling when they did attend a regular school.¹³ The decision to teach the children at home was not only because Paula Bonhoeffer was qualified to do so, but due to the fact that she was wary of the Prussian school system teaching her children at a young age,¹⁴ as she “thought nothing of Prussian education. She often expressed the view that Germans had their spines broken twice in life, first at school and then in the army.”¹⁵

One aspect of Paula Bonhoeffer’s character was that she developed her own thoughts and opinions on matters as she, “was a woman of definite opinions, even in medical matters, to her husband’s amusement. She permitted herself to have and express a world of feeling, including religious feeling.”¹⁶ Paula Bonhoeffer also held a keen interest in people, as she “was more interested in people than in nature, she took little notice of the scenery during the long walks...preferring to listen and to talk.”¹⁷ Dietrich

¹¹ Eberhard Bethge writes, “The household over which Paula Bonhoeffer presided belongs to an earlier era. It had a staff of at least five...She managed everything, sometimes causing outsiders to suspect that it was she who wore the trousers in the family. But closer knowledge disclosed a happy relationship in which each partner adroitly supported the other. At their golden wedding anniversary it was said that they had not spent a total of one month apart during their fifty years of marriage, even counting single days.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 16.

¹² Sabine Leibholz, *Childhood and Home*, 20.

¹³ Bethge writes, “Thanks to the excellent start that she gave them, they were able to skip entire grades and eventually take the school graduation exams at a remarkably early age, as Dietrich did.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 17.

¹⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 17.

¹⁵ Wind, 5.

¹⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 18.

¹⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 18.

Bonhoeffer developed many personality traits that his mother possessed, since “Dietrich was most like her: musical, sensitive, and interested in people and their stories.”¹⁸

Through the combined efforts of Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer their children grew in a home that caused them to flourish both mentally and physically. While both of them helped to influence Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s own personality directly, the type of home that they raised their children in was also extremely important. Gerhard Leibholz explains that “Both his father and mother brought up their son Dietrich with his three brothers, his twin sister and three other sisters, in Breslau and from (1912) in Berlin, in that Christian, humanitarian and liberal tradition which to the Bonhoeffers was as native as the air they breathed. It was that spirit which determined Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s life from the beginning.”¹⁹ His early childhood was pleasant and designed to give him the maximum ability to learn as much as he could. Although the day to day life at home was strict and regimented, there were still surprises and outings to make life interesting, as “Dishonesty and fibbing were severely punished; in comparison, broken windows and torn clothes hardly mattered.”²⁰ This pattern of discipline should not be surprising in a household that idealized learning and the living of life, but also desired to foster high ethical standards and strongly defined character as can be seen in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s actions later in his life, and in the actions of his family.

Bonhoeffer’s formal education did not start until the family moved to Berlin. Concerning the Bonhoeffer family’s move to Berlin, Bethge explains “When Dietrich’s father accepted the call to Berlin in 1912; he accepted the leading professorship for

¹⁸ Wind, 5.

¹⁹ Gerhard Leibholz, “Memoir”, 13.

²⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 19.

psychiatry and neurology in Germany.”²¹ Sabine Leibholz recalls that in “1913 Dietrich started school at the Friedrichs-Werder Gymnasium.”²² This decision of Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer to send their children to schools with strong humanities backgrounds was keeping with the family traditions of having a strong liberal humanitarian education as a basis of strong cultural understanding. An additional element of Bonhoeffer’s childhood was that he always kept his closest relationships within his immediate family. Sabine Leibholz recalls that “In spite of his exuberance and strength Dietrich was a sensitive child and did not attach himself easily to his schoolfellows. He found his playmates, of course in his brothers and sisters.”²³ This is not to suggest that Bonhoeffer never played with or associated with others outside of his family, but rather in his youth as in his adult life his closest relationships were with his family with only a few outsiders as close friends.

When the First World War broke out in 1914 the horrors of trench warfare, mustard gas and the loss of a generation of young men had yet to be experienced in Germany and the mood was optimistic and festive. The celebrated atmosphere was not shared in the Bonhoeffer household.²⁴ This enthusiasm that the youngest children originally felt subsided when the food shortages began. Although the First World War brought some new elements into Dietrich’s life, there were elements that remained the

²¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 21.

²² Sabine Leibholz, 23.

²³ Sabine Leibholz, 23.

²⁴ Bethge writes, “For the younger children the outbreak of the war was a time of great excitement. At the end of July they were hurriedly brought home after a month’s holiday in glorious weather in Friedrichbrunn. When one of the girls dashed into the house shouting: ‘Hurrah, there’s a war,’ her face was slapped.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 26.

same. He continued to succeed at school, although Karl Bonhoeffer noted in his 1915 New Year's diary entry that Dietrich had come to enjoy brawling.²⁵

Although his family remained part of the upper middle class, and as such did not experience the shortages to the same severity as others less fortunate, the First World War did not leave the Bonhoeffer family unscathed. Even the privileges associated with Karl Bonhoeffer's position at the university and with their various familial and political connections could not prevent the death of a son. The First World War dragged on long enough for both Karl-Friedrich and Walter to reach the age of military service in 1917. Although Dietrich Bonhoeffer had heard of cousins and other distant relatives that had been hurt or killed in the war, it was at this point in his young life that the war intruded severely into the life of his immediate family. Tragically, Walter Bonhoeffer died on 28 April 1918, five days after being wounded during an advance.²⁶ The entire family was heartbroken by Walter's death, especially Paula Bonhoeffer. Wind explains that "Dietrich was deeply affected by the death of his brother and by his mother's grief. The war had brought an end to an apparently sound world."²⁷

By the time of Walter's death, the Bonhoeffer family had been living at 14 Wangenheimstrasse in the Grunewald district for two years. The new house in the Grunewald district provided the final humanistic impulses in the early and formative years of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life, as "Grunewald developed into a neighbourhood of professors, and a number of Karl Bonhoeffer's friends and colleagues lived there, including the physicians His, Planck, Hildebrand, and anatomist Hertwig, a pupil of Ernst Haeckel...the historian Hans Delbück lived only a few doors away, and every Wednesday

²⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 24.

²⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 27.

²⁷ Wind, 12.

evening distinguished company gathered at his house, including Adolf von Harnack, Troeltsch, Meinecke, and Herkner... The Harnack's lived on the other corner and were related to the Delbürcks."²⁸ With this final move, the Bonhoeffer family submerged itself even more deeply into the liberal-humanitarian culture of Germany. The year after Walter's death provided an additional change to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life, as "Dietrich changed schools only as a sixth-grader, around Easter 1919. The Grunewald Gymnasium for which he left the Friedrich Werder school was somewhat exclusive."²⁹ In other words, Bonhoeffer was excelling academically and it would only be four more years until he reached university and began his training as a theologian.

The Bonhoeffer Family was not Anti-Semitic

Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer not only gave their children a liberal-humanitarian upbringing that provided them with a certain cultural ethos and first rate educational opportunities, but they also provided other impulses that would prove to be important in the years to come. A key influence on Dietrich Bonhoeffer was how his family treated Jews. Overall, it can be said within their own historical context that the Bonhoeffer family was not anti-Semitic.³⁰ Although the Bonhoeffer family had very little contact with those of Jewish descent that were considered non-assimilated or orthodox Jews, they did have contact with liberal or assimilated Jews. Within the context of the pre-Holocaust Germany the Bonhoeffer family did not refuse to associate with those of Jewish decent, they did not refuse to purchase from a Jewish owned shop, they did not refuse to work

²⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 29.

²⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 29.

³⁰ In the discussion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's relationship with the Jews there are varying opinions on whether or not the Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his family had anti-Semitic impulses. Stanley N. Rosenbaum and Eva Fleischner are both very critical of Bonhoeffer and suggest that he possessed anti-Semitic beliefs. See Stanley N. Rosenbaum, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Jewish View," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 18 (Spring 1981): 301-307; Eva Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology since 1945* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1975).

with or go to school with those of Jewish decent, nor did they verbally abuse or slander the Jews privately or publicly.

Karl Bonhoeffer, due to his work as the head of psychiatry and neurology at the University of Berlin, had Jewish colleagues and students, and he “always had several Jewish assistant-psychiatrists in his clinic at the Charite.”³¹ Although he was more than willing to have Jewish colleagues and students, he was not willing to communicate with Sigmund Freud and promote Freud’s work of psychoanalysis. Did Karl Bonhoeffer reject Freud simply because Freud was Jewish? The answer appears to be ‘no’, because he “was convinced that the world could be investigated and understood. He had no time for speculation, whether religious or scientific. So he had not time either for Sigmund Freud.”³² As well, Robert Gaupp, a colleague of Karl Bonhoeffer comments,

In intuitive psychology and scrupulous observation Bonhoeffer had no superior. But he came from Wernicke’s school, which was concerned solely with the brain and permitted no departure from thinking in terms of cerebral pathology... The theoretical interpretation of what was behind that being observed, of what occurred unconsciously and might project itself into consciousness was foreign to his approach...he had no urge to advance into the realm of dark, undemonstrable, bold and imaginative interpretation, where so much has to be assumed and so little can be proven.³³

This clearly shows that Karl Bonhoeffer’s reservations concerning the new developments within his field were not due to Freud being Jewish, but rather were due to differences in techniques and expectations. A second aspect to Karl Bonhoeffer’s rejection of psychoanalysis was that Bonhoeffer dismissed it out of hand as well, but this was because

³¹ Some of his pupils become friends of the family, such Krückmann, Kramer, Creutzfeld, Kallmann, Jossmann, Zutt, and Roggenbau, and later Scheller and Dr. Bormann. The political catastrophe of the thirties forced some of them to leave the country. See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 21.

³² Wind, 2.

³³ Robert Gaupp, *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Nervenheilkunde*, Vol. 161, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 22.

of his father's rejection of it, and as a result Bonhoeffer "never wrestled with Freud, Adler, or Jung."³⁴

Paula Bonhoeffer was also not anti-Semitic. During an incident in Bonhoeffer's childhood she made this quite clear. Bethge recalls that "As a small boy he once attacked a weaker classmate, whose mother expressed the grave suspicion that perhaps the Bonhoeffer children had been raised to be anti-Semitic. Paula Bonhoeffer replied that her son could not have heard of such a thing in her house."³⁵ The importance of the story is not Bonhoeffer's actions, but rather Paula Bonhoeffer's emphasis that her family was not anti-Semitic, especially when as previously mentioned Karl Bonhoeffer had noted that when Bonhoeffer was eight years old, he had developed a taste for brawling. Bonhoeffer must have outgrown this phase of his life within a few years as such aggressiveness was not mentioned again. A second interaction with another young Jewish boy in Bonhoeffer's early childhood was less eventful. In a letter to his grandmother, Julie Bonhoeffer, written around 3 July 1918 while on vacation, Bonhoeffer writes, "Two other boys are also here. One is 10 years old and the other 14. A little Jewish boy is here as well."³⁶ This shows that Bonhoeffer when he was ten years old was willing to make note of the fact that a little boy was Jewish, which seems to be within the context to be have been a point of interest for Bonhoeffer, and not a point of contention. Although the Jewish boy was noteworthy enough for Bonhoeffer to mention in a letter to his grandmother, it is important to note that Bonhoeffer is aware that the Jewish boy is

³⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 22.

³⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 19.

³⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Julie Bonhoeffer, 3 July 1918," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, ed. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 22.

different from the other boys that he mentions. Bonhoeffer would mention a similar interest concerning the Jews during his trip to Africa during his university years.

After the Bonhoeffer family moved to Berlin they were surrounded by those people of similar values, which included those of Jewish descent, and this was even more true when they moved to Wangenheimstrasse. Eberhard Bethge notes that "From early childhood the seven brothers and sisters of Dietrich had close Jewish friends from the Grunewald neighbourhood, and so did Dietrich himself."³⁷ This was in contrast to Bethge's own childhood, as he comments that "When I entered high school in Magdeburg there was also no Jewish teacher at any time and never a Jewish student in my classes (By contrast, my future friend Dietrich Bonhoeffer attended a Berlin high school in which half of his class mates were Jewish)."³⁸

The entire Bonhoeffer family were not really prepared for what was to happen in 1933 when the National Socialists seized power. This is not to suggest that the Bonhoeffers as a family were ignorant of the anti-Semitism in the general culture of Germany, but they underestimated it because of their social position and because they thought that their circle of friends were removed from it. Bethge explains,

Of course, one had been aware of the presence of noisy anti-Semitism in the culture at large. But until 1933 people like the Bonhoeffers scarcely believed that a lasting and even legislated resumption of discrimination against Jews could actually succeed. When the unconceivable began to happen, the whole family without exception tried to resist to the best of their ability...If earlier they had ignored the Romantic, brutal, and pseudo-scientific racial theories, in order not to confer on them the dignity of attention, now they rejected them all the more sternly.³⁹

³⁷ Eberhard Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews," 50.

³⁸ Eberhard Bethge, "The Holocaust and Christian Anti-Semitism: Perspectives of a Christian Survivor," *Union Theological Quarterly Review*, Vol. 32, 3-4 (1977): 143.

³⁹ Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews", 51.

It is possible that the Bonhoeffer family's liberal humanitarian outlook in life may have caused Dietrich and his family to underestimate the power, appeal and success of the National Socialist's anti-Semitic propaganda that was perceived by them as illogical and spurious. The people of Jewish descent that Bonhoeffer and his family associated with were Jews of similar ideals and social position. Bethge points out that "Naturally, the family's close Jewish relationships existed solely with assimilated or liberal Jews. No other types, such as seriously observant Jews appeared on their horizon. Whenever remnants of such customs appeared, they tended to be considered more interesting than problematic, more quaint than irritating."⁴⁰ The result was that in 1933 the Bonhoeffer family was forced to watch as those they knew and had befriended were deemed to be Jews by the state. Bethge explains that "Consequently in 1933 one had rather suddenly to come to grips with an alien and disturbing issue when those Jewish friends unexpectedly and unwillingly found themselves defined as non-Aryan, branded and stigmatized for their Jewish identity."⁴¹

In addition, "The fact that a kind of subtle anti-Semitism could lie in the liberal disregard of these friend's Jewishness...was not comprehended in these liberal Christian circles, especially not, because their Jewish friends generally perceived themselves as liberal Germans."⁴² To the contemporary interpreter this attitude of the Bonhoeffer family towards those of Jewish descent may appear to be condescending and perhaps even anti-Semitic. This contemporary understanding demonstrates how very different a post-Holocaust understanding of anti-Semitism is compared to how anti-Semitism was

⁴⁰ Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews", 51.

⁴¹ Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews", 51.

⁴² Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews", 52.

understood during the early years of Bonhoeffer and his family.⁴³ Clearly Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer did not by their own understanding harbour anti-Semitic views, especially since Karl Bonhoeffer had many colleagues and students that were of Jewish descent. The result was that the entire Bonhoeffer family rejected the anti-Semitic attitude within Germany and resisted the outworking of those beliefs when the National Socialists came to power in 1933.

Early Disapproval of Radical Political Groups

In the years leading up to 1933 the Bonhoeffer family did not support the National Socialist party in Germany or its leader, Adolf Hitler. Although the family was conservative politically, with the exception of Karl-Friedrich who through the war had developed a more socialistic leaning when he served at the front in the First World War,⁴⁴ they were not enamoured with ultra-right views of Hitler's National Socialists. Politics was not ignored by the Bonhoeffer family, but at the same time they were not a politically driven family, rather Bonhoeffer and his siblings all stayed within the professional middle class that was the tradition of the Bonhoeffer family. Although not politically driven, the Bonhoeffer family did live through the turbulent post-war years of the Weimar Republic. They lived through the initial reaction to the November Revolution of 1918, the lasting instability of the fledgling democracy, the embarrassment of the Treaty of Versailles, the awful period of inflation, and the emerging threats of both

⁴³ Eberhard Bethge explains that "I also came to understand how a survivor of Auschwitz might read these records... Today we know better. But then it just did not occur to Bonhoeffer that there are differences between anti-Judaism, Christian anti-Semitism, anti-Christian anti-Semitism, and racial anti-Semitism." See Eberhard Bethge, "The Holocaust and Christian Anti-Semitism: Perspectives of a Christian Survivor", 148.

⁴⁴ Bethge writes, "Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer supported the Social Democratic government that came to power as the result of the November revolution. He had become a socialist as the front, and this had already led to conflicts with the family outside of Berlin. His father let him go his own way; still his politics made him something of an outsider in the Wangenheimstrasse home." See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 30.

communism and Social Nationalism that eventually eroded the Weimar Republic to its collapse and the resulting seizure of power by the National Socialists in 1933. One of the most influential political events in the early life of Bonhoeffer was the assassination of Walter Rathenau on 24 June 1922, when Bonhoeffer heard the shots from his high school classroom. Concerning Bonhoeffer's reaction, a fellow classmate states:

I particularly remember Bonhoeffer on the day of Rathenau's murder...I remember the shots we heard during the lesson...I still recall my friend Bonhoeffer's passionate indignation, his deep and spontaneous anger...I remember his asking what would become of Germany if its best leaders were killed. I remember it because I was surprised at the time that someone could know so exactly where he stood.⁴⁵

This shows that Bonhoeffer was developing firm opinions against political extremism at this point in his life. In a letter to his sister Sabine, Bonhoeffer recalled that same day, stating, "I went to school and arrived after the third period. I just arrived when one heard a peculiar crack in the courtyard. Rathenau had been assassinated—barley 300 meters away from us! What a pack of right-wing Bolshevik scoundrels!"⁴⁶ Already at the age of sixteen Bonhoeffer was unimpressed with the antics of the ultra-right wing political groups. This distaste would be heightened a few weeks later when Bonhoeffer met a radical right wing proponent on a train. This encounter is recorded in a letter that Dietrich wrote to his parents around 7 July 1922.⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer writes, "One man actually began to talk about politics as soon as he entered the railway compartment. He was really very

⁴⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 33.

⁴⁶ The letter is given likely to have been written the day after the assassination of Rathenau. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Sabine Bonhoeffer, 25 July 1922," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, eds. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 49.

⁴⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer, 7 July 1922," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, eds. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 50.

narrow-mindedly right-wing...The only thing he had forgotten was his swastika. I was on the verge of joining in, but I preferred to let it be.”⁴⁸ This not only shows that Bonhoeffer had developed a low opinion of the extremist right wing, but also that he was aware specifically of the type of people that would become National Socialists.

The preceding has shown that Bonhoeffer was aware of the political situation in his early life leading up to his student years at university, but at the same time Bonhoeffer, like his family, was not overtly politically active in these years as well. Although the spectre of radical right in Germany was gathering, the Bonhoeffer family was focusing on both work and education. It was not until the early 1930's when the forces of National Socialism emerged in strength did the entire Bonhoeffer family, including Dietrich, become wary of them. The Bonhoeffer's reaction to the National Socialists will be discussed in the second half of this work in more detail.

Conclusion

Overall, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's family background provided him with a number of influences that resulted in him protesting the Aryan clause. His ancestors not only provided the basis for his upbringing in liberal humanitarian home, but through their own actions provided him with examples of the necessity of standing up for personal convictions. Similarly Bonhoeffer's own upbringing, education, and family life provided the foundation for his other life experiences that led him to reject the Aryan clause. As well, the Bonhoeffer family's disapproval of ultra-right wing politics and anti-Semitic attitudes had a direct influence on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's decision to reject the Aryan clause in 1933.

⁴⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer, 7 July 1922," 50.

CHAPTER TWO

STUDENT YEARS 1923-1927

Bonhoeffer started his university years in 1923 at the age of seventeen. After a four year period he had not only accomplished much academically at the universities of Tübingen and Berlin, including his first dissertation, but also had grown personally through joining a fraternity in Tübingen and travelling to Rome. Although Bonhoeffer could not have foreseen how the experiences of his student years would influence his life in the turbulent years to come, his academic training and his ever increasing life experience would provide a number of influences within this epoch of his life that would effect his decision to reject the Aryan clause in the early years of the National Socialist regime.

Fraternity and Military Experience

Bonhoeffer began his university education at the University of Tübingen, following in the footsteps of the rest of his family, as “It was a family tradition that the children should first attend the University of Tübingen, their father’s *alma mater*.”¹ The year at Tübingen proved to be unique in Bonhoeffer’s life as it provided him the only time during his initial university education that he would be away from his parent’s home in Berlin, allowing him the opportunity to develop new relationships. It was not only the absence of familiar surroundings that would be different for Bonhoeffer, but larger troubles within Germany developed during his time away.

The unfortunate reality was that 1923 was not a very stable year for Germany. Inflation was rising dramatically and the Ruhr area in Germany was occupied by France

¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 47.

because Germany was unable to make its war reparation payments.² Bonhoeffer was not immune from the events that would trouble the rest of country and the effects of the unchecked inflation were particularly troublesome. In a letter to his parent, Bonhoeffer explains that “I immediately bought Müller’s *Kirkengeshlicte* on the first day. It already costs 70 thousand instead of 55,000 marks. But I thought it would cost even more as time went on so I bought it right away...Unfortunately food is getting more and more expensive here. Bread already costs 1100 marks.”³ Although the continuing rising of inflation caused Bonhoeffer some distress, the political events that affected his country resulted in his involvement with a fraternity taking an interesting twist.

The fraternity that Bonhoeffer joined was the Igel, which is translated “Hedgehog.”⁴ Bonhoeffer joined the Igel primarily because it was the fraternity that his father had belonged to when he had been a student at Tübingen.⁵ Not surprisingly, the Igel was a fairly quiet fraternity when it came to politics.⁶ This is not to suggest that Bonhoeffer or the members of the Igel were oblivious to politics, instead it suggests that while politically aware, politics were not the focus of the group. As already mentioned the Bonhoeffer family was politically conservative, and the Igel would have shown the same traits for Bonhoeffer to have felt comfortable in joining their group, as “in 1923

² Richard J. Evans *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 103-109.

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer, May 1923,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, eds. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 58-59.

⁴ Raum, 31.

⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 48.

⁶ Bethge explains that “The Hedgehogs group was Swabian fraternity confined to Tübingen; it was not affiliated with any organization. It was founded in 1871 and was devoted to the patriotic ideas of the new German Reich. Initially, it deliberately dissociated itself from the behaviour of the duelling and color-carrying fraternities.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 49.

Dietrich had no political reservations about joining the Hedgehogs.”⁷ Although not overtly politically active the Igel did participate in military training in 1923 in response to the turbulent period within Germany at that time.⁸ Therefore, Bonhoeffer, as a member of the Igel went to Ulm to receive military training. In a letter to his father, he stated his displeasure about having to miss school in order to receive his military training.⁹ The same letter indicates that he volunteered for this training, because he thought it would be important to be able to support his nation in reaction to a crisis. His military training ended two weeks after it started, and he was pleased about his experience. Bonhoeffer seemed to be quite happy that he had done quite well in the training and that the training was over.¹⁰ While he also expressed his concern about General Eric Ludendorff attempting a coup, Bonhoeffer noted that the Igel was against any political action in that direction.¹¹

⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 49.

⁸ Elizabeth Raum explains that “Despite the provisions of the Versailles Treaty that prohibited Germany from developing a strong army, young men were secretly trained in military skills by the German army. The government had reason to fear that some German land, especially in the eastern regions, was in danger of being occupied by other countries.” See Raum, 31.

⁹ Bonhoeffer notes that “The situation is this: the imperial army...is training students and other people in Ulm and Constance. The training lasts for 14 days. It is ridiculous that these cannot be scheduled to coincide with vacation...At first, I thought that I could do this at another time and that it would be better not to interrupt the semester. I now think, however, that the sooner one gets this over with the better; then one can have the secure feeling that one can help in a crises.” See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl Bonhoeffer, 14 November 1923,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, eds. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 69-70.

¹⁰ On December 1, 1923 Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to his parents from Tübingen informing them that his military training had ended. He writes, “Well, today I am a civilian. I am very happy to be here again...It was, after all, very reasonable to perform one’s duty for two weeks....” See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer, 1 December 1923,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, eds. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 74.

¹¹ Bonhoeffer comments that “On the whole, the Imperial Army makes a very good impression. Although almost everyone is intensely reactionary, they are very companionable and decent to us students. Everyone is just waiting for the moment when Ludendorff will pull off the matter more effective support i.e., the support of the Imperial Army. This is the complete opposite of opinion of all the people up at the house,

Bonhoeffer's decision to proceed with his military training stemmed out of his sense of the political situation at the time in Germany, and out of a sense of duty to both his fellow fraternity members and his country, not out of any hidden radical political impulses. Bethge claims "Bonhoeffer's Ulm interlude was not based on any secret radical right-wing impulses. By nature and family tradition, he had little sympathy with this as he had with the numerous flag-waving pastors in the Protestant church at the time."¹² As well, Bonhoeffer "believed that he was acting in the service of the state of which he approved, and he was not motivated by a vision of the German people in arms. This military interlude very soon faded from his mind; in Finkenwalde he referred to it once or twice with amusement."¹³

The final major influence of the Igel upon the life of Bonhoeffer did not occur until 1933, when the fraternity conformed to the wishes of National Socialist state and accepted the Aryan clause.¹⁴ Bosanquet comments that "In the Igel Bonhoeffer made many friends, but the friendships did not survive the rise of Hitler's regime, when the Igel failed to make any protest against Nazi demands Bonhoeffer resigned."¹⁵ Bonhoeffer's association with the Igel demonstrates both his willingness to serve his country and his aversion to extreme political groups. Ultimately Bonhoeffer proved this by officially resigning from the Igel when they were complicit with National Socialist directives in regards to the Aryan clause. Bonhoeffer's willingness to disassociate himself from his

who want to murder Ludendorff. Today it seems that every one is stirred up in one direction or other." See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer, 1 December 1923," 75.

¹² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 53.

¹³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 53.

¹⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 48.

¹⁵ Bosanquet, 50.

fraternity over the issue demonstrates how seriously Bonhoeffer took the Aryan clause and his desire to disassociate himself from any group that would accept it.

The Roman Experience

After Bonhoeffer had completed his first year at the University of Tübingen, he was able to travel to Rome for a two month journey with his brother Klaus.¹⁶ Not only was Bonhoeffer able to enjoy the sites of ancient Rome, but he was transformed by encountering the church in its ancient splendour. Combined with observations made from a quick trip to Africa, this experience provided Bonhoeffer with a new perspective on the church and on religion that influenced him throughout his life, and equipped him in rejecting the Aryan clause in 1933.

Taking a trip to Rome was part of the family history, as “Rome was the city of the von Hase family. His great-grandfather’s experiences were influential [with] his twenty trips to Rome... Like Dietrich, his grandfather had never considered any other destination than Italy.”¹⁷ Although the grandeur of Rome surrounded Bonhoeffer upon his arrival, he was still aware of the political climate that existed on the streets. In his diary Bonhoeffer notes that “Cars with fascists were throwing pamphlets on to the street everywhere.”¹⁸ The political situation did not distract Bonhoeffer and his brother, Klaus, from enjoying the sites of Rome. The timing of arrival in Rome was especially beneficial for Bonhoeffer as the upcoming grandeur of the Roman Catholic celebration of the Easter was only a few days away.

¹⁶ Bosanquet, 51.

¹⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 56.

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Italian Diary,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, ed. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 84.

Throughout his entire trip to Rome Bonhoeffer became fascinated with the concept of the church. It is important that up to this point Bonhoeffer did not have a strong knowledge of Catholic practices, and as well, he had not been overly rooted in his own Lutheran heritage. The church, especially the universality of the church, was a concept that he was about to discover and his time in Rome as recorded in his Italian diary and his letters to family members expressed his new found appreciation for the church.

The beauty of Rome and the example of the Roman Catholic Church caused Bonhoeffer to reconsider seriously his understanding of the church. Bonhoeffer describes that he had “the most magnificent view overlooking the domes of Rome while the sun was setting...It was the first day on which something of the reality of Catholicism began to dawn on me—nothing romantic etc.—but I think I’m beginning to understand the concept of ‘church’.”¹⁹ This statement is important for two reasons. First, it is important that Bonhoeffer was willing to appreciate Catholicism. Second, it shows how Bonhoeffer was beginning to consider in earnest the concept of church.

During the Easter season, Bonhoeffer was able to attend Palm Sunday in St. Peters basilica, which provided him with some new insights into his concept of the church. The first concept that Bonhoeffer discovered was the universality of the church. In his *Italian Diary* Bonhoeffer elaborates stating, “The universality of the church was illustrated in a marvellously effective manner. White, black, yellow members of the religious orders—everyone was in clerical robes united under the church. It seems ideal.”²⁰ This observation suggests that Bonhoeffer, even at this point in life, believed

¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, “Italian Diary,” 89.

²⁰ Bonhoeffer, “Italian Diary,” 88.

that the church would be better off as a universal institution, rather than one that was one limited by nation and race.

Another aspect of the Roman Catholic Church that resonated with Bonhoeffer was how the religious life of the individual was not separated from everyday life. In a letter to his parents, written 19 April 1924, Bonhoeffer stated that “In Catholicism, there are many religious establishments where a vital religious life still plays a part. The confessional is an example of this.”²¹ Bonhoeffer was commenting on how truly separate the life of faith and life of everyday matters had become in German Protestantism. Bonhoeffer seems to have found that the Roman Catholic Church, and its members, still to some degree had kept some religious institutions, such as confession, as part of their daily life.

As a result of seeing Roman Catholicism in Rome in all its splendour and with its millions of adherents, Bonhoeffer was confronted with two different types of church, and began to write down his observations between the two, and realized the limitations of the liberalism within the German Protestantism in Germany. The first comment that Bonhoeffer makes is that reconciliation between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism was unlikely, as he notes, “The unification of Catholicism and Protestantism is probably impossible, although it would do both parties much good. Catholicism will be able to exist for a long time without Protestantism. The people are very devoted [to it]. The Protestant church often seems like a small sect when compared to the enormous range of

²¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer, 19 April 1924,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, eds. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 111.

the local festivals.”²² Bonhoeffer was expressing the reality that while Catholicism had adherents from various nations the Protestant church in Germany was largely a provincial church, limited to Germany.²³ This nationalism within German Protestantism would provide the basis in the years to come for those that wished to introduce racial elements into the church within Germany. In addition Bonhoeffer expressed that German Protestantism had largely done well due to the political climate that surrounded the Reformation, but in his present day the Protestant church was facing a waning influence in light of the rise of secularism.²⁴

In his diary, Bonhoeffer suggests that Protestantism may have been a very positive force for change if it had remained within the Catholic Church.²⁵ The traditional Lutheran position held that the church and state had different spheres of influence, but the Protestant church within Germany was closely linked to politics within Germany. Also Bonhoeffer expresses his opinion that the disillusionment of the Protestant church in the eyes of the German people was due to its involvement in the politics of Germany.²⁶ Although Bonhoeffer spoke out in the early 1930’s against the church

²² Bonhoeffer, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer, 19 April 1924,” 111.

²³ William Kuhns comments that Bonhoeffer “had never recognized that ‘Church’ meant a reality for more profound, and more deeply felt, than the experience of German parishes, or German theology, could ever suggest. Above all, Bonhoeffer came to recognize that the Protestant churches lack a vast dimension which Rome deeply affirmed: a vivid sense of the integrity and unity of Christ’s Church.” See William Kuhns, *In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Dayton: Pflaum Press, 1967), 9.

²⁴ Bonhoeffer writes, “Maybe Protestantism should not have tried to become an established church; perhaps it should have remained a large sect, which always have an easier time, and so might have avoided the present calamity. A territorial church believes that it has the ability to extend, to give everyone something. That Protestantism was able to do this when it began was largely due to a political climate no longer present today. The more the political situation changed, the more Protestantism’s ability to captivate the masses has dwindled. Now a lot of things are cloaked under the name Protestantism that one should openly and honestly call materialism.” See Bonhoeffer, “Italian Diary,” 106.

²⁵ Bonhoeffer writes, “If Protestantism had never become an established church, the situation would be completely different. It would still have a not inconsequential number of enthusiastic supporters. In view of its size it would hardly be designated as a sect but would have been an unusual phenomenon of religious life and serious thoughtful piety.” See Bonhoeffer, “Italian Diary,” 106.

²⁶ Bonhoeffer writes. “It would therefore be the ideal form of religion, which is sought after in so many ways today. It is not the content of the gospel of the Reformation that repels people so much as the form of

becoming too closely linked to the state, he began to realize during this earlier period that that the Protestant church in Germany may have to separate itself from the state, and such a separation would potentially be of great benefit to the church.²⁷

Although Bonhoeffer questioned the nature of his own church, he was not in anyway prepared to depart from it at this point. The importance of his musings and his questions were rooted in the fact that his time in Rome had kindled a desire to develop for himself a concept of church in response to what he had seen of the universality of the Roman Catholic Church. As well, these questions reflect a point in Bonhoeffer's life where he was beginning to question the assumptions of the Protestant church within Germany. Both of these developments would prove important for Bonhoeffer as he continued on in his university years and in the years to come.

During their trip to Rome, Dietrich and Klaus Bonhoeffer did venture across the Mediterranean to Tripoli, Africa, and it was from this vantage point that Bonhoeffer was able to make some observations about Arabs Jews and other religious groups. In a letter to his parents, Bonhoeffer notes that "The Jews are different. They are well respected here and are seen as smart, enterprising traders. Yet they consort with foreigners and are therefore considered to belong to a lower class."²⁸ This observation suggests that

the gospel, which one still tries to tie to the state. If it had remained a sect it would have become the church the Reformers intended. Now it can no longer be called that." See Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," 106.

²⁷ Bonhoeffer writes, "Perhaps herein lies a way to provide relief for the great difficulty the church finds herself in. The church must begin to limit itself and make choices in every respect, especially in the matter of its religious educators and materials. In any case she must completely separate herself from the state and maybe even give up the right to provide religious instruction. It wouldn't be long before the people return because they must have something. They could have rediscovered their need for piety. Could this be a solution? Have absolutely all other alternatives been exhausted? Will everyone soon return to the bosom of the 'only fount of salvation' under the guise of brotherhood? I would really like to know." See Bonhoeffer, "Italian Diary," 107.

²⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer, 5 May 1924," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, eds. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 116.

Bonhoeffer was intrigued by the positive treatment of the Jews in Tripoli as opposed to their situation back in Germany. In the same letter he makes note of his disappointment concerning how the Arabs were treated by the Italian soldiers, as he writes, “What enrages one the most here is that a people like the Arabs, who have such a well-developed sense of tradition and culture, are to be transformed into slaves. When one sees that the Arabs are treated with great brutality and vulgarity by the Italian soldiers, one can understand their bitterness and callous fear.”²⁹ This shows that Bonhoeffer was aware of the social injustice and inequality affecting various ethnic groups before his experiences of racism in America and in Germany after the National Socialists came to power in 1933. Bonhoeffer returned to Rome before returning to his parent’s home in Berlin. He spent the next three years finishing his theological degree within the theological faculty at Berlin University. However, the greatest influence upon Bonhoeffer during the next three years was Karl Barth.

The Initial Influence of Karl Barth

The theological department at Berlin was an entrenched bastion of Liberal theology, but during this time period the continental theological scene was entering into a time of debate with the emergence of dialectical theology and its proponents, such as Karl Barth.³⁰ James W. Woelfel claims “The major theological influence on Bonhoeffer was Karl Barth.”³¹ Although this may be true in the sense that Barth provided Bonhoeffer with new concepts to work with, his university professors, such as Adolf von Harnack,

²⁹ Bonhoeffer, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer, 5 May 1924,” 118.

³⁰ James W. Woelfel describes that “Bonhoeffer was a theological student during the period when Barth was shaking continental theology to its foundations.” See James W. Woelfel, *Bonhoeffer’s Theology: Classical and Revolutionary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 89.

³¹ James W. Woelfel, *Bonhoeffer’s Theology: Classical and Revolutionary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 89.

Karl Holl and Reinhold Seeberg were also very influential in their own ways.

Bonhoeffer's interest in Karl Barth's theology was not typical in the sense that he was not like many other young Barthians. Bethge points out "Unlike many young Barthians, he was neither a youthful rebel driven or shattered by the postwar crisis, nor a former pietist rebelling against his upbringing. Here was a well-balanced young man from an upper-middle class home who had been objectively convinced."³²

The effect of dialectical theology on Bonhoeffer's life was immense. Bethge explains that "With his discovery of dialectical theology, a new certainty replaced Bonhoeffer's restless wanderings. It was like a liberation; he now began to take real joy in his work. The distinctive task of preaching—the earthly concrete proof of God's work in the words repeated by human beings—was the starting point for this new theology, and this tore him away from the game of speculation."³³ Bonhoeffer began to shift away from focusing mostly on epistemology and more towards dogmatics at this time. As well, Barth's emphasis on the transcendence of God, as opposed to the emphasis on religious experience, appealed to Bonhoeffer. Bethge comments that Barth "made the religious experience, which Bonhoeffer had long sought with youthful enthusiasm and was the source of such difficulties for him, seem inconsequential. For Barth, the certainty being pursued here was anchored not in people but in the majesty of God, and could not exist separate from God."³⁴

Although Bonhoeffer found Barth's theology to be enabling in some respects, he did not become a true disciple of Barth and would disagree in certain areas. Bethge explains that "Thus, despite his gratitude for the essence of this theology, Bonhoeffer

³² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 75.

³³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 74-75.

³⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 75.

retained the right to think critically and independently. But he was criticized as an ally, where he saw weak points, he did not hesitate to offer alternative suggestions.”³⁵ One of the main objections that Bonhoeffer had with Barth’s theology was the emphasis that Barth had placed in the majesty of God, as Bonhoeffer “asked whether the free and inaccessible majesty of God is realized in freedom from the world, or whether it is not more the case that it enters in the world, since the freedom of God has committed itself to the human community.”³⁶ This would be a continual difference between Bonhoeffer and Barth in that Bonhoeffer wanted to make God’s actions concrete in the world, while Barth maintained God’s transcendence in the world. Bethge goes on to explain that Bonhoeffer’s “critique began at a point that characterized his own inner needs: he assumed that Barth’s emphasis on the inaccessibility and free majesty of God threatened and dispelled the due emphasis on humanity’s concrete earthly plight.”³⁷

Although Bonhoeffer was critical of Barth, some of his teachers in Berlin were wary of Bonhoeffer’s attention to Barth. By accepting some Barthian views Bonhoeffer drew to himself the criticism of his teacher, in particular Reinhold Seeberg. Andreas Pangritz points out that “in the seminars of 1925 and 1926 Bonhoeffer shows himself very much a ‘Barthian,’ much to the displeasure of his teacher Reinhold Seeberg.”³⁸ This suspicion would return in later years when Bonhoeffer began teaching at the University of Berlin.

³⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 75.

³⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 76.

³⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 75.

³⁸ Andreas Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 15.

Bonhoeffer and the Old Testament

During his university years, Bonhoeffer became aware of the issues surrounding the Old Testament that existed in German academic circles at that time. A major area of concern was the role of the Old Testament in contemporary academic studies. There were those that suggested that the Old Testament could largely be ignored or even removed from the Christian canon, while others insisted on its use and retention. Although in the 1920's this issue was mostly an academic one, the importance of the Old Testament in relationship to Christianity became a much larger issue when the National Socialist and the German Christians came to power.

In deciding to become a theologian, Bonhoeffer had already studied Hebrew before entering university. Bethge notes that "Since Bonhoeffer had already learned Hebrew in school, in Tübingen he immediately attended Volz's lectures on the Psalms and—very prematurely—Rudolph's on the Old Testament theology."³⁹ This shows that Bonhoeffer had a genuine appreciation of the Old Testament during his time at Tübingen, and this appreciation would continue in the years to come.

It was after he transferred to Berlin that Bonhoeffer was exposed to the different views of the Old Testament. Martin Kuske suggests that there were those that "rejected the Old Testament,"⁴⁰ those that wished to retain the "Old Testament as a witness of the pre-stage of Christianity"⁴¹ and those that acknowledged the "Old Testament as the Word of God."⁴² Bonhoeffer came in contact with the view that Old Testament could be rejected since it was propounded by Adolf von Harnack. Adolf von Harnack believed that

³⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 54

⁴⁰ Martin Kuske, *The Old Testament as the Book of Christ*, trans. S. T. Kimbrough, Jr. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 7.

⁴¹ Kuske, 10.

⁴² Kuske, 14.

Old Testament no longer needed to be retained as part of the canon since the Christian element could not be seen in it, although it could be useful to read.⁴³ In the years to come the National Socialists and the German Christians also rejected the Old Testament due to its Jewish character. Bonhoeffer rejected von Harnack's and the National Socialists' approach to the Old Testament.

Another of Bonhoeffer's Berlin teachers, Reinhold Seeberg, was a proponent of the second view of the Old Testament that suggested that the Old Testament be retained as a witness to the pre-stage of Christianity. Essentially Seeberg proposed that the Old Testament was necessary as it showed the progression of religion that ultimately led to Christianity as found in the New Testament which surpasses the religion found in the Old Testament. The result is that the New Testament is the sole source for dogmatics.⁴⁴

The third view that the Old Testament is the Word of God was largely promoted by Karl Barth during this time period. Barth believed that both the Old and the New Testaments spoke authoritatively in proclaiming Christ.⁴⁵ Another aspect of the third view was that it avoided the anti-Semitic aspects of the first two views of the Old Testament, especially that of the "refutation view" that said Judaism was inferior to Christianity, since "By rejecting the stage theory the Barthians were, in effect, positing the validity of revelation in the whole Bible and therefore allowing the Torah to be interpreted in a novel way into people's thinking. Thus in spite of some curious forms of Old Testament exegesis it helped to prepare a new relation to the recipients of the divine covenant, the Jews."⁴⁶

⁴³ Kuske, 9.

⁴⁴ Kuske, 11.

⁴⁵ Kuske, 15.

⁴⁶ Bethge, "Bonhoeffer and the Jews", 54.

In looking back over Bonhoeffer's early life it is clear to see that he was apprehensive of both the rejection view of von Harnack and the retention view of Seeberg. Bethge asserts that "It begins with Bonhoeffer's criticism, starting long before 1933, of his teacher's Seeberg and Harnack, above all his criticism of the latter's Marcionism and the related criticism and devaluation by both men of the Old Testament."⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer became attracted to the views of Karl Barth and those like him that saw both the New and Old Testaments as the word of God, because the retention of the "concept of revelation by the early dialectical theologians had at least this effect, that it made untenable the depreciating theory of stages of development from a supposedly primitive religion of the Old Testament, through the New Testament and church history, and so into the modern era of advanced humanity."⁴⁸

In the years to come "Bonhoeffer increasingly countered this with his acknowledgement of the Bible as an indivisible whole."⁴⁹ Although he was well versed in the liberal tradition of interpretation, he was also wary of it and the options that the early dialectical theologians offered were attractive. Bethge suggests that "Under such teachers, in Tübingen and Berlin, Bonhoeffer had developed competence in the use of historical-critical tools for research in the religious sources of Old and New Testaments, but already by the time of his promotion in December 1927, he fought, as his friend Franz Hildebrandt reports, resolutely against every sort of Marcionism."⁵⁰

One example of the latter effects of his acceptance of the Old Testament as the word of God can be found in one Bonhoeffer's lectures in the early 1930's, which clearly

⁴⁷ Bethge, "Bonhoeffer and the Jews", 54.

⁴⁸ Bethge, "Bonhoeffer and the Jews", 54.

⁴⁹ Bethge, "Bonhoeffer and the Jews", 54.

⁵⁰ Bethge, "Bonhoeffer and the Jews", 55.

stated his position that he “could not accept the widespread opinion that God’s love is reserved for the New Testament, while his anger and law are expressed in the Old.”⁵¹

This clearly shows that Bonhoeffer, at the time when the National Socialists were rising to power, was adamantly opposed to the popular belief that the Judaic elements be removed from Christianity.

Bonhoeffer’s acceptance of the Old Testament as the Word of God was a significant influence in his early life that contributed to his rejection of the Aryan clauses of 1933. His acceptance of the Old Testament was a direct contradiction of the teaching of the German Christians that demanded the Jewish elements be removed from the church. As well, his acknowledgement that the God of the Jews is the God of the New Testament was a strong statement that shows Bonhoeffer’s first tentative steps in believing that the Jews were loved by God of their own accord, and should not be persecuted because of their race or faith.

Conclusion

Overall, Bonhoeffer’s university years provided a number of significant experiences that influenced him decision to reject the Aryan clause in 1933. The first of these was that Bonhoeffer was able to avoid becoming overtly involved in the political youth movements of his day, rather he chose to join a moderate fraternity in his first year of university. Another series of influences came from his trip to Rome, where Bonhoeffer became aware of the universality of the church, the limits of his own church, and was able to make some critical comments concerning religions in general. In addition, Bonhoeffer’s original experience with the work of Karl Barth enabled him to begin his journey to becoming an independent thinker who was neither a disciple of Karl Barth nor

⁵¹ Bethge, “Bonhoeffer and the Jews”, 55.

bound to his liberal heritage. Lastly, Bonhoeffer accepted the Old Testament as the Word of God, and rejected any anti-Semitic impulses that sought to remove the Old Testament as an authoritative aspect of the Christian canon. All of these influences affected Bonhoeffer in his decision to protest the Aryan clause.

CHAPTER THREE

AMERICA 1930-1931

The third aspect of Bonhoeffer's life that contributed to his decision to reject the Aryan clause in the early years of the National Socialist regime was the time that he spent in the United States of America. Bonhoeffer came to the United States to study at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where he encountered numerous new experiences and concepts that were based in the American context. Although Bonhoeffer's year in America was extremely busy and many things were strange and wonderful to him, there are three main aspects of his first American tour that contributed to his later stand against the Aryan clauses. The first of these was the social theology that had been and was still developing at the time of his study. The second aspect was the racism that existed in America, especially against the African-American population, which Bonhoeffer had started to observe intimately due to his work in Harlem. The third aspect was the introduction to the concept ecumenicism from fellow foreign student Jean Lasserre.

America and Union Theological Seminary

Bonhoeffer's American experience occurred at a time when his life in many ways came to a halt. Bonhoeffer was only twenty four when he had completed two doctoral theses, which were the requirements for becoming a university lecturer. In addition, Bonhoeffer had also completed all of the requirements necessary for ordination, but was a year short of the minimum age requirement of twenty-five. Bonhoeffer's year in America was a chance for him to leave home and experience life completely away from his family.

It was also his last year of unbridled learning and freedom, a time of relative calm before the National Socialists began their rise to power that culminated in 1933. Originally Bonhoeffer did have some reservation about studying in America, but with help and encouragement of Superintendent Max Diestel, Bonhoeffer ended up being assigned through the Academic Exchange Service to Union Theological Seminary.¹ Although Union Theological Seminary was liberal in its orientation, the one reservation that Bonhoeffer did have that was not relieved is that he did not expect anything from North American theology. Even systematic theology at Union Theological Seminary was not seriously thought of by Bonhoeffer at that time. Bonhoeffer's time in America expanded his academic horizons beyond dogmatics and provided crucial experiences that developed his own life outside of academia, and these experiences provided new view points that affected his life in the years to come. Bosanquet explains that "But in spite of the absence of theological substance, Union Theological Seminary owned one virtue that was not conspicuous among the learned members of the theological faculty at Berlin—a burning concern to bring what they knew of Christianity into contact with daily life at every point."²

Bonhoeffer arrived in America in the fall of 1930. The city that gave Bonhoeffer his first impression of America was New York City. Upon his arrival, Bonhoeffer "was overwhelmed by New York and the giant concrete buildings between the Hudson and the East River...But he soon saw the other side. In 1930 the unemployment in America was proportionately was much higher than in Germany, and this was causing widespread

¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 142.

² Bosanquet, 83.

alarm.”³ In retrospect it is perhaps a good thing that Bonhoeffer did visit America and experience New York City in time of distress. Not only did this present Bonhoeffer with a realistic view of America, instead of a romanticized one, but also it presented to him the need for theology to be made relevant to problems that suffering people have in their daily lives.

Another aspect to Bonhoeffer’s arrival in New York was the news from Germany. Raum explains that “The news from Germany was not reassuring...Dietrich stayed in touch with his family through letters. Their letters reported growing unemployment...a Nazi gain of over one hundred seats in the recent election, and increasing anti-Jewish sentiment.”⁴ The American perception of events in Germany were not much better, as “There were new concerns about the German lust for another war; these struck Bonhoeffer as very curious. He had not yet taken into account the unusual Nazi gains through the September elections in Germany. A plan for a German-Austrian customs union aroused fears of an *Anschluss* and rumours of an impending putsch crossed the Atlantic.”⁵ These reports alarmed Bonhoeffer greatly and he mentioned these things to his family. Karl Bonhoeffer replied quickly and calmly stating that there was no early indication of a putsch or of Germany going to war as not even the Nazis were not idiotic enough to believe that a war could be won.⁶ In the months to come Bonhoeffer was surprised to discover that the Americans had moved on from World War I, which was in stark contrast to Germany.⁷

³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 149.

⁴ Raum, 45.

⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 149.

⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 142.

⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 144.

Although Bonhoeffer was concerned about the events occurring back in Germany, he was excited to begin his experiencing the New World, and the institution that would be centre of his time in America, Union Theological Seminary. Union Theological Seminary was the center of liberal theology in the United States of America. Union Theological Seminary “was nearly one hundred years old at the time; by American standards this made it an institution steeped in tradition. Originally a Presbyterian college, at the turn of the century it had altered its founding statutes to become an interdenominational seminary, and it had become a focal point for the most progressive liberal minds.”⁸ At the time, because of its embracing of liberal theology, Union Theological was considered to be a unique institution in many respects with America, which had led to its international reputation. When Bonhoeffer was in America, Union Theological Seminary “...was at its height at the time; it already had ecumenical ambitions and was a favourite goal for visitors from Europe.”⁹

In addition to attending lectures and writing papers, Bonhoeffer made friends and it was from here that his various off-campus experiences originated. One of the friendships that Bonhoeffer cultivated was with Erwin Sutz. In Sutz, Bonhoeffer found someone that knew about the theology of Barth, and some that he could dialogue with about continental theology.¹⁰ Bonhoeffer and Sutz remained in contact upon both of their returns to Europe. As already briefly mentioned, Sutz was responsible for Bonhoeffer finally meeting Barth when he returned to Europe.

⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 156.

⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 156.

¹⁰ Bethge notes that “Erwin Sutz was a Swiss citizen, understood both the source of his friend’s discontent and the direction of his arguments...It was Erwin Sutz who finally brought Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth into personal contact with each other. Sutz had studied under Barth and Brunner.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 149.

Another friendship that Bonhoeffer cultivated was with another seminary student, Paul Lehmann, who was Bonhoeffer's window into the white educated middle class of America. In many ways Lehmann provided a sense of support and comfort for Bonhoeffer, and Lehmann could understand why the theological statements of professors and students at the seminary could make Bonhoeffer's hair stand on end."¹¹ It is interesting to know Paul Lehmann's overall impression of Bonhoeffer: "First of all, Bonhoeffer was an 'un-German German'."¹² This overarching description of Bonhoeffer points to some of Bonhoeffer's unique traits that continued to develop in the years leading up to 1933 and his rejection of the Aryan clause.

Although Lehmann notes that Bonhoeffer did possess many typical German traits,¹³ more important were the characteristics that were un-German. Lehmann writes, "Characteristically 'un-German' however, were noticeable absence of condescension in his dealings with his fellow students, whether in the dormitory or in the classroom... his openness to every new experience... perhaps the most 'un-German' thing about him was his sense of humour. He never took a theological argument with ultimate seriousness; and even the refusal of the tennis game, though firm was tongue-in-cheek."¹⁴ The lack of condescension and the willingness to experience new things were not traits that would be found in the early period of Nazi Germany that would be marked by considering other

¹¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 155.

¹² Paul Lehmann, "Paradox of Discipleship", *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Ronald Gregor Smith and Wolf-Dieter Zimmerman, eds., trans. Käthe Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 42.

¹³ Lehmann goes on to explain that "Characteristically German were his blond hair and heel-clicking, head-nodding, stiffly bowing handshake. His impressive physique lent support to a resolute bearing and firmness of purpose that simply took command, uncalculated command, of every situation in which he was present. It was apparent that he was destined for leadership, for which he was equipped by national and cultural habit. Characteristically German was also the range and rigor of his knowledge, his impatience with mediocrity of thought and taste, and with anything less than the thoroughness through which excellence of achievement is born." See Paul Lehmann, "Paradox of Discipleship", *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 42.

¹⁴ See Paul Lehmann, "Paradox of Discipleship", *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 43.

races as inferior. As well, these “un-German” traits would explain his openness to new ideas in America, and many of these new ideas and experiences would aid in equipping Bonhoeffer in his efforts to reject the Aryan clause in 1933. The first of these would be Bonhoeffer’s introduction to social oriented theology at Union Theological Seminary.

The Introduction to Social Theology

The approach to theology at Union Theological Seminary was quite different from Bonhoeffer’s previous academic experience within Germany. The reality was that Bonhoeffer had largely focused his own studies around dogmatics and exegesis and these were not the emphasis at Union Theological Seminary.¹⁵ Bonhoeffer’s introduction to North American theological method that focused on the social aspects of life was difficult for him to adjust to in that the focus was so completely different than the dogmatic emphasis in continental theology. Bosanquet comments that “Having abandoned the expectation of learning anything valuable in theology, Bonhoeffer threw himself into this unexpected form of religious education with zest. The subject was Life, so Life it should be, and Dietrich began to live and observe the life of Christian America with all its native intensity.”¹⁶ The result was that the students at Union Theological Seminary developed a different set of skills in which to do ministry, as “Future ministers were expected to master things, not the loci of the creeds or history of dogmatics. The ability to arrive at a sound judgement on contemporary problems or help shape political opinion was a marginal priority in a German theological faculty.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Bethge explains that “The 1930-1931 seminary course offerings probably astonished the student from Berlin. There was an almost complete lack of exegesis or dogmatics. To compensate, there was a great deal of ethics, and an abundance of courses devoted to the analysis and explanation of contemporary American philosophy, literature, and society.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 159.

¹⁶ Bosanquet, 84.

¹⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 159.

Although Bonhoeffer did not necessarily agree with how theology was taught at Union Theological Seminary, he did realize throughout his time in America that the social aspect of theology was important and deserved his attention. His teachers at Union Theological Seminary encouraged Bonhoeffer to address social concerns. Reinhold Niebuhr criticized Bonhoeffer for not focusing on practical ethical application within his theology. Concerning Bonhoeffer's thinking, Niebuhr notes

In making grace as transcendent as you do I don't see how you can ascribe any ethical significance to it. Obedience to God's will may be a religious experience, but it is not an ethical one until it issues in actions which can be socially valued. Any other interpretation of ethical than one which measures an action in terms of motion empties the ethical life of content and makes it purely formal.¹⁸

Niebuhr's admonition that Bonhoeffer needed to integrate the concrete relevance of issues into his theology did have an effect. In the years to come Bonhoeffer began to address social concerns as part of his vocational duties, but he also strived to provide a solid theological foundation for his social endeavours. Similarly Bethge recalls that, "Privately Bonhoeffer was already concerned about the implications of the ethical concreteness of revelation, but he defiantly insisted on the correct premise had to come first, and must remain independent of any premature interest in their ethical effects."¹⁹ This shows that "Although he showed little willingness to listen to opposing arguments in the realm of theology, Bonhoeffer showed unlimited interest in areas where he hoped to gain new knowledge or discovered better methods or vantage points."²⁰

The most important aspect of Bonhoeffer's introduction to the social based theology of America was not only the realization that social issues need to be an integral

¹⁸Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Barcelona, Berlin, Amerika: 1928-1931*, vol. 10, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke, ed. Reinhard Staats and Hans Christoph von Hase (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1992), 423.

¹⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 160.

²⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 160.

part of theology, but also that the church needs to be active in addressing social concerns in a practical manner. Bethge comments that “Bonhoeffer was impressed by the vigour with which churches and other organizations tackled working-class problems, and the selflessness with which Union Theological Seminary students, among others, shared the life of the unemployed.”²¹ This example provided a model for Bonhoeffer’s own action during his ministry in Berlin in 1932.

Bonhoeffer showed a positive response to the social gospel a year later in a report written to his church about his American experience. Bethge writes, “In his report to his church on his year in America, Bonhoeffer combined criticism with an overriding concern to emphasize the good side of the phenomenon; as a result, he was able to show his own church and its theology that it might, perhaps, be a little provincial.”²² It would be in the years to come that the influence of the social gospel would become more evident in Bonhoeffer’s life.

The Problem of Racism

Although Bonhoeffer could have focused his attention solely on the academic life at Union Theological Seminary, he chose instead to become involved in a community that was completely different from his own. Bonhoeffer chose to become involved with a black church in Harlem of his own volition, an extension of a friendship that he made with Albert F. Fisher, an African American student at Union Theological Seminary. Josiah Ulysses Young III comments that “One of Bonhoeffer’s classmates at Union Theological Seminary, Fisher, was the one who introduced Bonhoeffer to Harlem and

²¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 163.

²² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 158.

served as his conversation partner about the abuse of black people in America.”²³ It was through this friendship and through his involvement in the community of Harlem in the early 1930’s that Bonhoeffer saw for himself the effects of racism and poverty. It was from these experiences that Bonhoeffer began to understand the need to develop a personal understanding of standing up for those that were oppressed and the need for the church to do the same.

The fact that Bonhoeffer had arrived in America just as the full effects of the depression were beginning to hit the entire nation accented even further the bleak picture of Harlem life. Bonhoeffer was not content to be an observer in the lives of the people of Harlem; instead he chose to become heavily involved. It was because of his willingness to participate consistently in the lives of the people within the community that he gained acceptance. Describing the situation, Raum explains that “Frank Fisher had broken the color barrier by attending Union. Dietrich Bonhoeffer broke it again by participating in church services in Harlem. He not only worshipped and assisted in the Sunday schools; he was invited into homes where he had the opportunity to meet Harlem families and to learn what it meant to be black in a segregated America.”²⁴

The racism that Bonhoeffer experienced in America was not only the oppressive nature of the poverty within Harlem, but in the times that Bonhoeffer experienced it first hand through his friendship with Albert Fischer. The most well known example of these incidents was concerning the refusal of service in a restaurant. Bethge records that “When it became clear on one occasion that Fischer was not going to receive the same service in

²³ Josiah Ulysses Young III, *No Difference in the Fare: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Problem of Racism*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 13.

²⁴ Raum, 46.

a respectable restaurant as the other customers, the friends ostentatiously walked out.”²⁵ These actions foreshadowed Bonhoeffer’s reaction to the Aryan clause. Josiah Young asserts that Bonhoeffer’s “action [leaving the restaurant] was no mean feat when you consider what Bonhoeffer would do in regard to the Aryan clause; his disdain for America’s double-standard foreshadowed what he would do when the chips were down back home.”²⁶

Bonhoeffer experiences of racism accentuated his willingness to be friends with someone that was oppressed by the society in which he lived. Bethge notes that “It was natural that this friendship was not established with the same ease as that with Paul Lehmann, and freedom of this relationship had to be confirmed repeatedly. But Bonhoeffer possessed a convincing talent for extending friendship with no strings attached.”²⁷ This willingness to associate with those that others from his own class and circle rejected was a constant theme for the rest of Bonhoeffer’s life.

In addition to Bonhoeffer viewing the negative aspects of Harlem and the oppressiveness of the black experience within Harlem, Bonhoeffer was able to also gain from the positive aspects of their struggle for advancement and their vibrant spiritual life, as “He collected the publications of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, and began to collect gramophone records of spirituals, which he used five years later to introduce his students to this world that was practically unknown at the time.”²⁸ Another example of this appreciation is found in a letter that Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to his grandmother wherein he comments that “I have again just finished a quite

²⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 155.

²⁶ Young, 57.

²⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 154.

²⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 150.

outstanding novel by a quite young Negro. In contrast to other American writing, which is either cynical or sentimental, I find here a very productive strength and warmth.”²⁹ Bonhoeffer’s willingness to learn from the African-American experience demonstrates his ability to respect and to find worth in others different from himself.

Another problematic effect of the racism in America was the effect upon the Christian church as many churches were divided by race. Bethge describes that “Bonhoeffer noted with dismay that the so enviable integration of the white churches into the life of the community was actually an obstacle to the solution of the racial problem. Although greatly impressed by the fervour of the Negro services, he was disturbed by the noticeable and growing estrangement of the younger generation from the faith of their fathers, who had accepted all this discrimination so patiently.”³⁰ Bonhoeffer witnessed in America the peril of having a church that was divided by race, which is why he would later object to the suggestion in the 1930’s of having the Protestant church in Germany split over the issue of race.

Bonhoeffer made the same effort again in his ministry with the poor and socially different in Berlin and in his lasting friendship with Franz Hildebrandt, a fellow pastor in Germany that was oppressed by the state due to his Jewish heritage. Bonhoeffer personally protested the church’s willingness to accept or compromise with National Socialist regime’s anti-Semitic laws and attitudes. He did not merely passively protest, but was active in trying to keep the Aryan clauses out of the church so that Germany would not have a church that was divided by race.

²⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 150.

³⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 151.

Jean Lasserre and Ecumenicism

In addition to Bonhoeffer being influenced by North American social theology and by the racism that existed in America, he was also influenced by being confronted by the concept of pacifism. To make matters even more interesting was the fact that the man that introduced Bonhoeffer to this concept was a Frenchman, Jean Lasserre, who was also studying at Union Theological Seminary on exchange at the same time as Bonhoeffer. For Bonhoeffer, this friendship that he developed with Jean Lasserre was unnatural. Bethge explains that “Bonhoeffer initially viewed his other European friend, Jean Lasserre as much less of a kindred spirit. It was the first encounter with a Christian pacifist of his generation, and Lasserre was a Frenchman; it was much difficult for a German to shake off all feelings of resentment.”³¹ With the loss of World War I to the Allies and the subsequent occupation of the Ruhr region by France in 1923 many Germans resented the French. By befriending Jean Lasserre Bonhoeffer began to overcome his own nationalistic feelings.

It can not be forgotten that the Protestant church in Germany to which Bonhoeffer belonged was nationalistic in its outlook, and as such had supported the German war effort during the First World War. Pacifism had no strong basis within Bonhoeffer’s German context and the result was that the idea of Christian pacifism was one that new to him, because “In contrast to the undisputed sincerity and earnestness of many theologians at Union Theological Seminary, Lasserre confronted him with an acceptance of Jesus’ peace commandment that he had never encountered before.”³² The idea that Jesus was being literal in his admonishments within the Sermon on the Mount was a new concept

³¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 153.

³² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 153.

for Bonhoeffer. Renate Wind explains that “Of course, Dietrich, too, knew this chapter from the Gospel of Matthew. But generations of theologians had already been acutely concerned to tone down the Sermon on the Mount in a German Protestantism that was not at all pacifist. Their version ran: the Sermon on the Mount does not consist of instruction for transforming the world, but indicates the need for it to be redeemed by God, which the church proclaims in the gospel.”³³ This German Protestant view of the Sermon on the Mount would be rejected by Jean Lasserre, who insisted that “...being a Christian meant ‘quite simply’ following the commandments of Jesus and putting the fellowship of Christians into practice in a credible way, beyond all frontiers.”³⁴

Although Jean Lasserre challenged Bonhoeffer’s preconceptions regarding the Sermon on the Mount, it should be noted that Bonhoeffer did not become a hard line pacifist, but rather the concept of pacifism encouraged him to promote peace and co-operation as much as possible. Bosanquet comments that “Bonhoeffer was not wholly converted to pacifism, nor persuaded to abandon his critical attitude to the Oecumenical Movement, but his mind had been opened and began to be strongly exercised in two wholly new directions, while his narrow nationalism fell off like an abandoned disguise.”³⁵ His involvement within the ecumenical movement when he returned to Germany demonstrated Bonhoeffer’s willingness to engage these new ideas. It was through Bonhoeffer’s new understanding of the concept of pacifism and his upcoming work in the ecumenical movement that “Bonhoeffer’s academic knowledge of Lutheran

³³ Wind, 36.

³⁴ Wind, 36-37.

³⁵ Bosanquet, 89.

ethics transformed into a committed identification with Christ's teaching of peace. The biblical-ecumenical belief in the one body of Christ became his foundation."³⁶

The effects of the concept of pacifism upon Bonhoeffer were many. The influence from this was that Bonhoeffer overcame the German prejudice towards the French in friendship with Jean Lasserre. This act of friendship is testimony to Bonhoeffer's ability to transcend the nationalism that became such a powerful force with the National Socialists rise to power. Bonhoeffer's ability to look beyond German nationalism and his desire to pursue peace caused him to reject the war-oriented hyper-nationalism of the National Socialists and those within the German Protestant church that held such views. Bonhoeffer's embracing of pacifism led to a desire to be involved with international cooperation between the churches and led to his involvement with ecumenical movement when he returned to Germany. Bonhoeffer willingness to be involved in the ecumenical world with its emphasis on pursuing peace provided Bonhoeffer with other influences that caused him to reject the Aryan clause.

Conclusion

Although Bonhoeffer's time in America provided him with numerous experiences and challenges, he was challenged specifically in three ways. The first was that the social theology that he observed through his time at Union Theological Seminary influenced his ministry when he returned to Berlin and also gave a different perspective on the nature of ministry from others in his German Protestant tradition. In addition, Bonhoeffer began to see the importance the church becoming actively involved in social issues, and this had a clear influence on his protest of the Aryan clause in 1933. As well, Bonhoeffer's experiences in Harlem warned him of the tragedies of racism and poverty, and of the evil

³⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 153.

of the church supporting a separation within itself according to race. This provided Bonhoeffer with another influence that contributed to him rejecting the Aryan clause. Finally, Bonhoeffer's introduction to the concept of pacifism and his subsequent introduction to ecumenical realm, equipped him to transcend the ever growing nationalism within Germany. The ability to move beyond the ever increasing nationalistic influence within Germany proved essential to Bonhoeffer rejecting the Aryan clause in 1933. Bonhoeffer returned to Germany with new perspectives on ministry and theology just before the life altering events of Adolf Hitler's rise to power in 1933.

CHAPTER FOUR

VOCATIONAL EXPERIENCES 1931-1932

When Bonhoeffer returned to Berlin, he entered into a new era of life. Bonhoeffer had already fulfilled the requirements for ordination and the qualifications for becoming a teacher before his year of free study in America. He now had to focus on beginning his professional career. Bonhoeffer had the choice between entering the academic sphere, or starting a career in the church, but at this point in his life he chose to pursue both options. This period of his life leading up to 1933 provided the final influences in his life that led him to reject the National Socialists' Aryan clause. The first influential aspect of Bonhoeffer's life during this time was his academic work. The second aspect was his ministerial efforts within Germany. Finally, the third aspect of Bonhoeffer's life that influenced him was his initial involvement within the ecumenical movement.

The Academic Realm

When Bonhoeffer entered into academic life again in 1931 he was no longer a student, but as a young lecturer at the University of Berlin. In many respects, Bonhoeffer should have been coming home as this was the same institution where he had spent most of his student years and where he had completed his first two early theological works. Yet Bonhoeffer was not an insider within the circle of theologians that surrounded him, instead he had become an outsider, due to his relationship with Karl Barth.

Shortly after returning to Germany, Bonhoeffer was able to develop a personal relationship with Barth, instead of merely knowing Barth's writings. Bonhoeffer was able to meet Karl Barth due to his friendship that he developed with Erwin Sutz during his

time in America. In a letter to Sutz, Bonhoeffer described his impression of meeting with Barth this way: "I am coming to understand more and more why Barth's writings are so tremendously difficult to understand. I have been impressed even more by discussions with him than by his writings and his lectures. For he is really all there. I have never seen anything like it before and wouldn't have believed it possible."¹

It is clear that Bonhoeffer appreciated that Barth was willing to have dialogue with other people, rather than claim exclusively that he had all the answers from the outset. This would be important to Bonhoeffer as he began to dialogue with Barth the man as opposed to interacting with Barth's publications alone. Perhaps this willingness to dialogue was the greatest influence of Barth upon Bonhoeffer. The first real example of this willingness to dialogue was their disagreement concerning ethics. Bonhoeffer writes, "We very soon came to the problems of ethics and had a long discussion. He would not make concessions to me where I expected that he would have had to...But I was glad to be able for once to hear Barth's position in detail."² The importance for Bonhoeffer in relation to meeting Barth in person is that it began a forthright relationship that would discuss many issues, including the Aryan clause and the challenges that the German church was facing in 1933. The most crucial aspect of their relationship at this time is that they were willing to agree and to disagree in certain areas. This meeting would lead to Barth encouraging and challenging Bonhoeffer to stand firm in 1933 for his convictions in regards to the Aryan clause.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, 24 July 1931," in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Fontana Library, 1970; Fontana Library, 1971), 116.

² Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, 24 July 1931," 116.

After his meeting with Barth, Bonhoeffer returned to Berlin and his position as a university lecturer. Bonhoeffer brought a different perspective to the theological faculty at the University of Berlin. This difference was a defining characteristic for Bonhoeffer at this time in his life, and as a result influenced him to further distance himself from not only fellow academics at the university, but also from the larger liberal theological tradition as a whole. It was this degree of separation that enabled Bonhoeffer to clearly reject the Aryan clause in 1933.

The timing of Bonhoeffer's return to lecturing at Berlin University was interesting. There were over a thousand theology students enrolled within the department and people would be willing to attend a new professor's lectures as long as he was not overly dull.³ More troubling was that many if not most of the theology students belonged to the National Socialist party.⁴ Although this did not directly affect Bonhoeffer's teaching at this time, it does provide a signpost of the close ties that developed between the National Socialist party and the Protestant church as a whole, and this later association directly affected Bonhoeffer in regards to the church struggle and the Aryan clause.

As Bonhoeffer lectured he became aware that he was beginning to be viewed with suspicion by members of the faculty.⁵ Bethge notes that "His colleagues followed the

³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 207.

⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 207.

⁵ Bonhoeffer writes, "My theological extraction is gradually becoming suspect here, and they seem to have the feeling that perhaps they have been nourishing a serpent in their bosom! I hardly see any of the professors, not that this grieves me inconsolably. Since my return from Bonn, things here seem to me to be worse than ever. Recently, on two consecutive days, I had the first lecturers and then my students here at my home. I must say that the students were considerably more interested in theology than were the lecturers." See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, 25 December 1931," in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Fontana Library, 1970; Fontana Library, 1971), 135-136.

course taken by the graduate of their own faculty with interest and certain suspicion.”⁶

The bastion of liberal theology that constituted the theological faculty was quite correct in viewing Bonhoeffer as different from themselves, which he was by that point in time. Bonhoeffer grew increasingly aware that he was at this point without a true theological home. This is another reason why Bonhoeffer valued his new relationship with Barth at this time. Bethge comments that Bonhoeffer viewed “Barth’s home as a ‘shelter for the theologically homeless,’ to which he ‘thinks back only with longing in the cold loneliness here.’”⁷ In 1933 Bonhoeffer would find attention being drawn away from the academic realm as he would find himself moving away from the compromises that the theological faculty would be willing to make in regards to the Aryan clause. It is important to understand that it was due to Bonhoeffer’s outsider perspective that he was able to object freely to injustices that were imposed by the Aryan clause.

In the summer semester of 1932 Bonhoeffer addressed the topic entitled “The Nature of the Church.”⁸ A draft of one of the papers survives entitled, “What is the Church?” and this draft provides a window into Bonhoeffer’s view of the church. The portion of the text that is relevant to this discussion is his view of how the church should relate to the political realm. Bonhoeffer was wary of the church becoming too political in the sense of supporting a particular party, but he was not suggesting that the church withdraw into itself and ignore politics. Bonhoeffer began this section of this paper by discussing that there was a political aspect to the act of preaching. He writes,

⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 211.

⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 216.

⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “What is the Church?”, in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Fontana Library, 1970; Fontana Library, 1971), 149.

- The preaching of the church is therefore necessarily “political”, i.e. it is directed at the order of politics in which man is engaged. But precisely because it is “political” it is primarily concerned with the critical limit of all political action. The church is the limit of politics and therefore eminently political and a-political at the same time. Because the church testifies to the penetration of the limit it points to what is limited, to the law, to order, to the state. The church limits the state, the state limits the church.⁹

Not only does Bonhoeffer clearly assert that there is a definite political aspect for the act of preaching, but he also suggests that the church and the state act as limiting agents for one another. Bonhoeffer then goes on to explain the appropriate boundaries between the church and the state. This is what Bonhoeffer would refer to as the first political word of the church to the state. Bonhoeffer comments that

The first political word of the church is the call to recognise the proper limit, the call to commonsense. The church calls this limit sin, the state calls it reality; both though with different stresses, might call it finitude. Politics in finitude—that is the first eminently political word of the church, and this word frees the church from party politics and in the ‘political’ sphere properly frees it from allegiance to any party. Note carefully, the first word of the church is not “Make politics Christian”—that would be again to mistake the limit—but “Recognise finitude”.¹⁰

Bonhoeffer acknowledges that the both the church and the state place limits upon society, although they each do so in a different manner. Bonhoeffer was aware that there may be some willing to include a second political word from the church to the state which would propose a church affiliation with a particular party. Bonhoeffer was extremely wary of the idea that the church might need to rely on or identify with a particular political party. Bonhoeffer felt that this use of a second word that closely affiliated the church with a political party would compromise the initial concept of separating church and state.¹¹

⁹ Bonhoeffer, “What is the Church?”, 152.

¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, “What is the Church?”, 152.

¹¹ Bonhoeffer writes, “Does the church have a second word for politics? It is here that the dispute arises. A concrete command of the church can be heard, and the carrying through of this command—perhaps through a political party—is possible in principle. But even here the question can only be of the concrete command within the limits of finitude, of the state, and not of a programme of Christian political ideology which mistakes its limitations. And there will always be the need for thorough-going self-examination to

Bonhoeffer's analysis then takes a prophetic tone as he notes that any undue involvement of the Protestant church within Germany would likely result in the exploitation of the church. Bonhoeffer argues that "The one necessary thing follows from this, namely that in the present situation nothing can be so damaging and soul destroying for the Protestant Church as unconsciously being exploited (in the party struggle) as the last still-unused political power within Germany. That would be its certain end."¹²

Although Bonhoeffer was likely aware of the beginning encroachment of the German Christians and the National Socialists upon the Protestant church, he could not have known that only a year later that the words be proven true. The closing of the essay reiterates Bonhoeffer's warning and his desire for the church to become more vigilant about entering party politics. He concludes his essay stating, "But the church today really has a second political word, a commission, and there is a real possibility that it will be done to death and ground to pieces in the agony of party-political happenings—this dilemma calls the church into its political responsibility and decision."¹³ Summarizing Bonhoeffer, Kuhn states that the "church has two words to speak to the state: the first under ordinary conditions, the second in a time of crisis. The first word is for the state to recognize its limit and finitude. Bonhoeffer acknowledges that the existence of a second word is disputed; yet he suggests an active political responsibility and decision."¹⁴

Bonhoeffer was stressing the need that the church must avoid the temptation of allying itself with any one particular party. Bonhoeffer clearly states that if the church

see whether this command has really been heard or not. Thus it will be continually necessary to ask whether this command really requires a special political party or whether it does not require the sense to make use of existing political parties, in other words whether the risk should really be taken of jeopardising the highly political substance of the church in its first word beyond party politics by allowing it with its second word to actually enter party politics." See Bonhoeffer, "What is the Church?", 152-153.

¹² Bonhoeffer, "What is the Church?", 153.

¹³ Bonhoeffer, "What is the Church?", 153.

¹⁴ Kuhns, 57.

and any political party become too close then the lines between the church and the state will become blurred. This essay is important for many of these concepts resurfaced in Bonhoeffer's initial critique of the Aryan clause. The ideas of maintaining the proper spheres of influence of the church and state, as well as Bonhoeffer's admonition to the Protestant church to not become involved in politics, were needed less than a year later.

Ministerial Endeavours

When Bonhoeffer returned from America he began not only his academic duties, but began to have ministerial responsibilities as well. As already mentioned, when Bonhoeffer left for America he was only twenty-four, a year under the minimum age requirement for ordination, but when he returned to Germany he was able to be ordained. Although Bonhoeffer now had clerical status, he still was not able to apply for parish positions, as he was required to fulfill a year of auxiliary service.¹⁵ It was through his auxiliary service that Bonhoeffer had his first truly significant ministerial experience of this period: the Wedding confirmation class.

This experience of the Wedding confirmation can be seen as a precursor of Bonhoeffer's willingness to associate and invest in those that were different from him. As such, it is a latent example of how he would act towards the persecuted members of the Third Reich. Although this experience was an important aspect to Bonhoeffer's life it was not one that he chose for himself. Bethge writes, "Amid the demands of his first lectures, ecumenical plans, and the beginning of his ministry, the consistory told Bonhoeffer to take over a confirmation class in the Zion parish in the Berlin district of Wedding."¹⁶ Not only was the confirmation class put upon Bonhoeffer's shoulders

¹⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 221.

¹⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 226.

without much warning and in the midst of an already full plate, but it also demanded that Bonhoeffer work in a district that was very much the opposite of his parent's neighbourhood. Bonhoeffer in a letter to Sutz describes that the Wedding area "is the most hectic part of Berlin, with the most difficult social and political problems."¹⁷ To compound the matter was the fact that the class was quite ill behaved and had forced the previous teacher to distraction. Describing his first experience with the confirmation class, Bonhoeffer writes that "At the beginning the boys behaved like mad things, so for the first time I had real problems with discipline."¹⁸

Bonhoeffer was completely committed to this class of confirmation students, since, "The Wedding experience had a deep impact on Bonhoeffer. When it was decided that he should continue with the class until they were confirmed, he reduced his other commitments to the minimum."¹⁹ The commitment, however, was not just to the children during their instructional class. Rather it was to involve the student's parents and the students themselves outside of the class, which meant that Bonhoeffer himself moved to the Wedding District for two months in order to do this well.²⁰ Bonhoeffer's interactions with these less fortunate youngsters went beyond the ordinary. In another letter to Sutz, Bonhoeffer writes, "Since the New Year I've been living here in north Berlin so as to be able to have the young men up here every evening. In turns, of course. We eat supper and then we play something—I've introduced them to chess, which they now play with great enthusiasm. In principle anyone can come, even unannounced, and they all love

¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, 25 December 31", 136.

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, 25 December 31", 136.

¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, 25 December 31", 136.

²⁰ Bonhoeffer writes, "I am keeping all fifty of them and will be living in the neighborhood for two months in order to get it done. I am looking forward to this time immensely." See Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, 25 December 31", 136.

coming.”²¹ Bonhoeffer’s willingness to go out of his way to help those that he felt obliged to help would continue in the years to come. Bethge also notes that “He devoted his free evenings to his confirmation candidates. They were allowed to come and see him uninvited, to play chess or take English lessons. Each received a present at Christmas. On weekends he took them on trips to youth hostels...As the day of confirmation approached, Bonhoeffer distributed a huge bolt of cloth for making confirmation suits. The boys were asked to assist with the sermon by telling him what they expected from it.”²²

A less happy aspect of Bonhoeffer’s work with the Wedding confirmation class was the pastoral visits to their homes; these proved to be an eye-opening experience for him. He writes concerning the boy’s homes that “Their home conditions are generally indescribable: poverty, disorder, immorality.”²³ Yet it was not only the living conditions that caught Bonhoeffer’s eye, but more so it was the feeling that his training had not adequately prepared him for this type of work, especially in the area of pastoral care. This negative experience for Bonhoeffer exposed him to the reality of pastoral ministry, an aspect of the ministry that he felt he had not been trained to handle. Although this aspect of ministry may have been awkward Bonhoeffer would persevere and would see his confirmation students through their ceremony and beyond. The confirmation of the boys was the same day as the March election of 1932.²⁴

²¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, 26 February 1932,” in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Fontana Library, 1970; Fontana Library, 1971), 146.

²² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 227.

²³ Bonhoeffer, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, 25 December 1931,” 136.

²⁴ Bonhoeffer writes, “As a contrast to this there are my worst experiences in visiting their homes. I sometimes, indeed often, stand there and think that I would have been as well equipped to do such visits if I had studied chemistry. It sometimes seems to me that all work comes to grief on the care of souls. To think

Bonhoeffer did not turn his back on these boys as soon as their confirmation class was complete. Instead he tried to maintain the relationships that he had developed. He even took some of them on a vacation after their confirmation ceremony.²⁵ In fact many of the young men would maintain contact with Bonhoeffer into the Second World War.²⁶ The importance of the Wedding experience in Bonhoeffer's life was that it introduced him to not only a group of unruly boys that he befriended, but it brought him out of his naturally upper middle class environment into the world of the poor and uneducated lower class. The overall result was that Bonhoeffer grew to care deeply about these people that were different than him. In 1933 Bonhoeffer made the same decision to invest time and energy towards a group of people that he was different from, these people would be the ones affected by the Aryan clause.

A similar experience to the Wedding Confirmation class was Bonhoeffer's involvement with the Charlottenburg youth club, which was designed to provide a safe place for unemployed youth. Like the Wedding experience Bonhoeffer attempted to reach out to those who had a very different background; they were poor, proletarian, and some were even communists. The main difference was that this position was not appointed to Bonhoeffer by the church; rather it was rooted in his own initiatives and those of his own acquaintances.

of those excruciating hours or minutes when I or the other person try to begin a pastoral conversation, and how haltingly and lamely it goes on...perhaps it is really the end of our Christianity that we fail here. We have learnt to preach again, or at least a little bit, but the care of souls?"²⁴ See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 228.

²⁵ Richard Rother recalls that "After we left school Pastor Bonhoeffer took ten of us to the Harz Mountains, where we spent a fortnight with him, an unforgettable time. For most of us this was the first journey away from the grey houses of northern Berlin. At that time of unemployment, in 1932, practically none of us had any money and there was no chance for a child to get away from the stony desert of the city." See Rother, Richard, "A Confirmation Class in Wedding," in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith and Wolf-Dieter Zimmerman, trans. Käthe Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 57.

²⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 228.

The foremost purpose of the Charlottenburg youth club was to provide a place where unemployed young people could find a place off the streets. The idea of forming a youth club for unemployed youth was based on Bonhoeffer's knowledge of such social work in New York and in Berlin.²⁷ Clearly, Dietrich's experience in America and the influence of the social gospel was finding an outlet in this aspect of Bonhoeffer's ministry. Bonhoeffer's idea for a youth club was aided by the willingness of Anneliese Schnurmann to be the club's initial benefactor, and by his students that helped to prepare the club for its opening.²⁸

The Charlottenburg youth club opened in the fall of 1932. There were some initial successes and there were also come difficulties as the youth drawn to the club included drinkers and communists.²⁹ The initial efforts resulted in the official opening on 8 December 1932.³⁰ The youth club would soon be forced to close a direct result of the National Socialists rise to power. Bethge explains that "The club flourished only for a brief time. As a result of Hitler's ascension to power on 30 January 1933, Anna von Gierke was forced out of her job in Charlottenburg, and Anneliese Schnurmann had to leave Germany. The Communist members of the club were harassed on the street. When he learned that the club was going to be raided, Bonhoeffer spirited them away to his wooden hut in Biesenthal for a short time. After that the Communists scattered to different parts of Berlin."³¹ The end result was that due to the actions of the police, the Charlottenburg youth club was forced to close, because "After the police searched the

²⁷ Bonhoeffer's "acquaintance with Harry Ward's work in New York was behind this idea, as well as, his contact with Siegmund-Schultze and his social work in east Berlin." See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 229.

²⁸ Wind, 41.

²⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 230.

³⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 230.

³¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 231.

club hoping to find the card index of members, the organizers had to reconcile themselves to closing it. Concern for the unemployed workers now yielded to concern for another, far more deeply branded group of people: the Jews.”³²

The unfortunate end of the Charlottenburg youth club provided Bonhoeffer with ample evidence of how quickly that National Socialists could become a threat and actively dissemble anything that they viewed as a threat. It is interesting that it was already in 1933 that Bonhoeffer was involved with protecting a group of people from the state. Not only were the communists persecuted, but Bonhoeffer own acquaintance and friend of the Bonhoeffer family, Anneliese Schnurmann, fled Germany due to her Jewish heritage. The experience of being involved in the Charlottenburg youth club prepared Bonhoeffer to reject the Aryan clause of 1933.

The final ministerial aspect of this time period that helped to influence Bonhoeffer in his rejection of the Aryan clause was the new political and social emphasis that he included in his sermons. An important aspect of Bonhoeffer’s ministerial duties during this period was the act of preaching. It was in this period that Bonhoeffer began to address the issues of his day, especially social and political concerns during this time.

One example of this new emphasis was his Harvest Festival sermon preached in Berlin, 4 October 1931. The sermon was titled “God’s Loving Care and Human Suffering,” based upon Psalm 63:2. Bonhoeffer clearly addresses the social issue of unemployment that had hit Germany in force. Bonhoeffer writes, “The harvest has not brought us what we hoped for. This has already caused great sorrow. But on top of this comes one of the worst plagues which can ever be inflicted upon a people, and which is now spreading across the world, unemployment. We must be prepared for the fact that

³² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 231

this winter seven million people will find no work, which means hunger for fifteen to twenty million people next winter.”³³ This is a good example of how the social gospel had begun to influence his preaching. This was the first of many sermons for Bonhoeffer that showed his concern for the social-political environment that surrounded him.

Another example of Bonhoeffer addressing the political situation of his day occurred when Franz von Papen became Reich chancellor in 1932. Bethge writes, “Brüning finally resigned at the beginning of June; Franz von Papen became Reich chancellor to restore stability. But on 12 June 1932 Bonhoeffer preached incisively in the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church against the Papen government’s misuse of God’s name”³⁴ Bonhoeffer objected to the government’s use of God’s name in justifying their rhetoric without considering that God’s name should not be used so lightly. Bonhoeffer writes, “Our disobedience is not that we are so irreligious, but that we are very glad to be religious...very relieved when some government proclaims that Christian worldview...so that the more pious we are, the less we let ourselves be told that God is dangerous, that God will not be mocked.”³⁵

Bonhoeffer also preached on Reformation Day celebration in 1932. Bonhoeffer expressed his concern about using Luther to justify the actions and lack of actions of the church. Bonhoeffer declared that

The church of the Reformation...does not see that whenever it says “God,” God turns against it. *We* sing “A mighty fortress is our God,”...but *God* says: “I have this against you!” The church that is celebrating the Reformation does not let Luther rest in peace, he must be dragged into justify all the evil that is taking place in the church. The dead man is propped up in our churches, made to stretch

³³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “God’s Loving Care and Human Suffering,” in *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelley and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 206.

³⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 236.

³⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 236.

out his hands and point to this church, and repeat with self-confident pathos: Here I stand, I can do no other...It is simply untrue, or it is unpardonable frivolity and pride, when we hide behind this statement. We can do otherwise!³⁶

This warning against the church was due to Bonhoeffer's impression that the church had become lax. Bonhoeffer was wary of his church's increasing passivity with the world that he suggested that there was much more that the church could accomplish.

Overall the preaching from this time period shows that Bonhoeffer was growing increasingly concerned with social issues, politics, and the response of the church to these issues. It is clear from these sermons that Bonhoeffer was keenly aware of situation that the church was heading towards, and he was using the pulpit to speak to the people in regard to these matters. More importantly Bonhoeffer's willingness to speak publicly about politics, social issues, and the response of the church toward became very important in 1933 when he vehemently protested the Aryan clause.

Involvement in the Ecumenical Movement

After returning to Germany in 1931, Bonhoeffer was introduced to the ecumenical world. This was largely due to the fact that during this time Berlin was a centre of ecumenical efforts in Germany. Bonhoeffer was an ideal candidate for ecumenical work at this time in his life as he was young, open minded, fluent in English, and well educated, as well as possessing no ultra-right wing or ultra-nationalistic ideals. This resulted in Bonhoeffer becoming a youth secretary of the World Alliance and caused him to meet others that provided allies in his protest against the Aryan clause. In addition, the ecumenical world also presented Bonhoeffer with opportunities to confront the nationalist theologians prior to the tumultuous months of 1933.

³⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Reformation Day Sermon, 1932" in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 237.

Bonhoeffer's initial involvement in the ecumenical world was largely due to the influence of Superintendent Max Diestal, who made Bonhoeffer a youth delegate to the World Alliance conference in Cambridge in September 1931.³⁷ It was through attending this conference in Cambridge that Bonhoeffer began his career within the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches.³⁸ Bonhoeffer's work with the World Alliance also led to other ecumenical involvements.³⁹ The World Alliance may seem to have been a strange group for Bonhoeffer to have associated with due its foundation, which was rooted in "the liberal and humanist Anglo-Saxon theology."⁴⁰ Due to his affinity to Karl Barth and desire for serious theological discussion, Bonhoeffer was theologically quite different than others within the World Alliance. Another result in Bonhoeffer's life from being involved with the ecumenical movement was that he was able to transcend the nationalism of many fellow German citizens. At the time that Bonhoeffer began his ecumenical career, ecumenical activities were coming under attack from aspects of the Protestant church in Germany that were against such internationalist ties.

Although the Cambridge conference did not begin until 1 September 1931, Bonhoeffer as a youth delegate actually attended the youth conference from 29-31 August.⁴¹ It was during these three days of the youth conference that Bonhoeffer was nominated as a international honorary youth secretary responsible for Germany, central and northern Europe, Hungary and Austria, and the decision was ratified a few days later

³⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 190.

³⁸ Throughout the rest of the paper the World Alliance will be used as a short form for the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches.

³⁹ Bethge explains, "Bonhoeffer's ecumenical career began in the World Alliance, which led to his association with the Council of Practical Christianity (Life and Work). He was never directly associated with the Faith and Order movement. See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 193.

⁴⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 193.

⁴¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 199.

at the main conference.⁴² His position as youth secretary gave him the right to attend the Sofia in 1933 and Fanö conferences in 1934, even though his protest against the National Socialist government and the German Christians would likely have excluded him otherwise.⁴³

The other important aspect of the Cambridge Conference for Bonhoeffer was that he found that he was able to work well with the French delegates. Bethge writes that “Apart from the official sessions, there was a special Franco-German youth meeting that continued until late at night and revealed the extent to which the aspirations and criticisms of the younger theologians from both countries coincided.”⁴⁴ This ability to work with the French not only shows the positive effects of Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Jean Lasserre from Bonhoeffer’s time in America, but also that Bonhoeffer was willing to put his nationalistic tendencies aside for the sake of the church as a whole.

As a youth secretary for the World Alliance, Bonhoeffer had many commitments to fulfill, and he became increasingly aware of the opposition to the ecumenical movement by those within his own country during this time. The minutes of a youth committee meeting the following April record that “Herr Bonhoeffer said that the results of the Cambridge conference were few in Germany, owing to opposition to the work of the World Alliance on part of nationalist theological professors.”⁴⁵ The hindrance to the ecumenical movement caused by the nationalistic professors continued to increase as the National Socialists gained power in Germany.

⁴² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 200.

⁴³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 200.

⁴⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 200.

⁴⁵ “Minutes from the Youth Commission Meeting in London, April 1932,” in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Fontana Library, 1970; Fontana Library, 1971), 135.

The largest challenge to face Bonhoeffer at this time in regard to his work as a youth secretary was the political situation of the church in Germany towards ecumenism. This largely stemmed from those that believed that German Churches could not participate internationally with countries that at the same time—from their perspective—were treating Germany unfairly. A second aspect of contention with Germany towards international cooperation between the churches was rooted in certain theological differences. Theological dialogue would have interested Bonhoeffer in regards to ecumenism, as he would view the lack of theological dialogue within the larger ecumenical context as disappointing.

The concept of “orders of creation” was the focus of many German theologians after the First World War. Keith Clements explains that

For the more nationalistically minded Protestant theologians—who included erudite and sophisticated figures of international reputation such as Paul Althaus and Emmanuel Hirsch—the key theological concept was that of ‘orders of creation’ This is the doctrine that certain structures of human life are not just incidental biological or historical phenomena, but are deliberately ordained of God as essential and immutable conditions of human existence, without which humanity is not humanity as created by God.⁴⁶

Although the general concept of the “orders of creation” was used by many theologians in the 1920’s, it would be used in a much a different manner by the nationalist theologians within Germany as a way of introducing other ideas into theology such as racial and national allegiance. Keith Clements asserts “The German nationalist theologians, however, made a much freer and quite arbitrary use of the idea of ‘orders of

⁴⁶ Keith Clements, “Ecumenical Witness for Peace,” *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John De Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 163.

creation', claiming above all that *the* supreme 'order of creation' is the people, race or nation to which one belongs and owes loyalty."⁴⁷ Clements notes

Such an understanding became the mould for recasting the meaning of the entire body of Christian belief. So, for example, when the creed confesses belief in God as maker of heaven and earth, this becomes the confession that God has created me with my particular nationality and its special characteristics. God has therefore bound me to submit myself to the forces working out the destiny of my nation, and to cooperate with its spirit, and it is in the flowering of a nation's life that we see what creation really is.⁴⁸

Such thinking would allow for admonishment that the people submit to the will of the nation as the will of God.

The 1932 conference within Germany worked on the two topics Bonhoeffer regarded as fundamental questions of ecumenical work: "The Church and the Churches" and the "Church and the Nations", in other words, the confessional question and the peace question."⁴⁹ Although Bonhoeffer enjoyed participating in the theological discussion in general, he "opposed the older generation, and maintained that ecumenical work was evading the truth if it did not grapple anew with the concept and reality of heresy. He vigorously attacked the idea of 'orders of creation.'"⁵⁰ In the "Main Report of the Berlin Youth Conference, April 1932," Bonhoeffer's attack upon the "orders of creation" is recorded. The report states

In the discussion, Bonhoeffer attacked the concept of orders of creation which formed the basis of Stählin's report and the application of this concept to the present problem. It was impossible to single out some features of the world above others as orders of creation and base a course of Christian moral action upon them... Stählin's distinction between the separation and the diversity of the nations, of which only the second belonged to the orders of creation, would not be pressed. To which example did language belong, seeing that as diversity it was the reason for the separation of peoples (Gen. 11)? It was this presupposition, i.e.

⁴⁷ Clements, 163.

⁴⁸ Clements, 163.

⁴⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 241.

⁵⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 241.

the orders of creation, which provided a justification of war between the nations. If the task of fighting derives from obedience to the certain orders of God's creation, why should one's struggle not be declared to be a struggle for God's cause? This could only be doubted when the certainty of the orders of creation was shattered. Bonhoeffer therefore felt that the concept of orders of creation should be excluded from the discussion of these themes. It was a dangerous and fallacious basis.⁵¹

Bonhoeffer's rejection of the "orders of creation" was rooted in that this line of thinking lead to the justification of war, even a war of an aggressive nature. Bonhoeffer then offered a counter idea of the "order of preservation," which shifted its focus from the various objects of creation to interpreting the objects of creation through their relation to Christ. The main reports states that

The concept of "orders of preservation" of God should be introduced in the place of orders of creation. The difference was that in the light of the concept of orders of creation, certain ordinances and features of the world were regarded as valuable, original, "very good" in themselves, whereas the concept of orders of preservation meant that each feature was only a feature preserved by God, in grace and anger, in view of the revelation in Christ. An order is only to be regarded as an order of preservation of God should be carried out by Christ and only preserved for his sake. An order is only to be regarded as an order of preservation so long as it is still open to the proclamation of the Gospel. Where an order is basically closed to this proclamation, be it apparently the most original, marriage, nation, etc., it must be surrendered. The solution of general ethical problems, and here of the ecumenical problem, must be sought only in the revelation of God given in Christ, and not from orders of creation.⁵²

Rather than accept that all that existed was good because God created everything, Bonhoeffer's concept of the order of preservation considered the importance of something in light of Christ and the Gospel message.

The debate over the issues surrounding the "orders of creation" would not disappear. Theological issues, like the order of creation, concerned Bonhoeffer

⁵¹ "Main Report from Berlin Youth Conference, April 1932," in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Fontana Library, 1970; Fontana Library, 1971), 175-176.

⁵² "Main Report of the Berlin Youth Conference, April 1932," 176.

throughout his involvement in the ecumenical movement. Bonhoeffer's disagreements with the nationalists would also continue in the years to come within and without the ecumenical movement, especially in his protest against the Aryan clause.

As an international youth secretary for the World Alliance, Bonhoeffer brought to the ecumenical movement his characteristic and uncharacteristic German qualities.⁵³ Many of these qualities would set him apart from people of his own country, but his foreign colleagues noticed that although personable he did retain certain German traits. Bethge explains that "For his foreign counterparts, particularly those from English speaking countries, he sometimes seemed all too German in his devotion to theological analysis, which they saw as an impractical hindrance. Still, they did not note only his obstinacy but also his charm, humour and 'good fellowship.'"⁵⁴

The first major conference after Cambridge was the conference at Cierňohorské Kupele in Czechoslovakia. The title of Bonhoeffer's address was "On the Theological Basis of the Work of the World Alliance."⁵⁵ In essence it was an attempt by Bonhoeffer to put forward his desire for the World Alliance to have a stronger theological foundation for the work that it was doing, especially in response to the nationalistic theology within Germany. Bonhoeffer's essay struck out against nationalistic theology, especially the "orders of creation" theology, which would be the focal point of his address at the conference. Bonhoeffer expressed his wariness against the nationalistic argument that

Because the nations have been created different, each one is obliged to preserve and develop its characteristics. That is obedience to the Creator. And if this

⁵³ Bethge explains, "The emphasis of Bonhoeffer's ecumenical activities was on relations with churches abroad. Compared to most of his German colleagues, his combination of overseas experience, knowledge of foreign languages unusual among German theologians of his era, and his theological training put him in a class by himself." See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 244.

⁵⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 244.

⁵⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 246-247.

obedience leads to struggles and to war, these too must belong to the order of creation...One need only hold out something to be God-willed and God-created for it to be vindicated for ever, the division of man into nations, national struggles, war, class struggle, the exploitation of the weak by the strong, the cut-throat competition of economics.⁵⁶

Bonhoeffer objected to the notion that God's will can be understood through the "orders of creation," because the world is not as God intended, but is sinful and corrupt.

Bonhoeffer stated

But the mistake lies in the fact that in the solution of this apparently so simple equation the great unknown factor is overlooked, the factor which makes this solution impossible. It is not realised in all seriousness that the world is fallen and that now sin prevails and that creation and sin are so bound up together that no human eye can any longer separate one from the other, that each human order is in order of the fallen world and not an order of creation.⁵⁷

Bonhoeffer was commenting on the reality that sin does have an impact on the various structures within the world, and people can no longer assume that everything that exists is as God would have it. This was the reason behind Bonhoeffer's "orders of preservation" that believed that structures within the world were in God's will as they align with Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer's rejection of the "orders of creation" is important as similar thinking from the National Socialists and the German Christians would suggest that the Aryans and Non-Aryans were in conflict, and it was perfectly acceptable to remove the non-Aryan element from the Protestant church within Germany. This issue would resurface again in the events of 1933.

Bonhoeffer's stance on this issue is important. It shows how wary he was of nationalist theology within his own country and how it threatened the work of the

⁵⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "A Theological Basis for the World Alliance?" in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Fontana Library, 1970; Fontana Library, 1971), 162.

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, "A Theological Basis for the World Alliance?" 162.

ecumenical movement. Although the Aryan clause had not been introduced by this time, the thinking underlying the opposition would be used again in defence of the Aryan clause. It is also important that Bonhoeffer still seemed quite optimistic at this time in regards to the World Alliance being able to become a true force for good. It is likely due to this hope that Bonhoeffer engaged the ecumenical movement with the desire that they might put pressure on the German church to reject the Aryan clause in 1933.

The last major conference of 1932 was the Gland Conference that was held 25-31 August 1932. The main theme of the conference was “the call of Christianity in the Present crisis.”⁵⁸ The German delegates were not only made up of the traditional internationalists, but also had some students that were members of the National Socialist party. In fact, Bonhoeffer had brought some of his own students with Nazi sympathies along as well. Bonhoeffer may have “wanted his ecumenical friends in Gland to see a representative of the type that was rising to power in Germany, and also to show the Nazi a different dimension at the international level. The Nazi member’s presence in Gland led to the German and the French delegates once more spending many hours in discussion together.”⁵⁹

Bonhoeffer desired that the World Alliance take a more systematic approach to its theology. Clements notes that Bonhoeffer “believed strongly that the World Alliance should take itself more seriously as an expression of the church of Christ, and not simply as an ad hoc gathering of like-minded Christians trying to make an impact on the world.”⁶⁰ His previous work at Ciernohorske Kupele hinted at this aim, but it had been understood by many as not focusing enough on issues such as international cooperation.

⁵⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 250.

⁵⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 253.

⁶⁰ Clements, 156.

The Gland Conference provided Bonhoeffer with the opportunity to provide clarity on some of his decisions. Bonhoeffer succeeded in calming his British critics that had despaired that this young German was focusing too much on theology, and not enough on the issue of international cooperation.⁶¹

The first aspect of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's involvement in the Gland conference shows that he was increasingly aware of the increasing presence of nationalists within Germany, and that at this time he was still able to dialogue with the nationalists at this time in the hopes that he would be able to change their point of view. The second aspect of the Gland conference was that he was able to communicate clearly the need for a theological basis for the World Alliance, while recognizing that the pragmatic aspect was still more important to many people, especially the British delegates. Unfortunately, the events of 1933 would change these two aspects. No longer would dialogue with nationalists in hopes of changing their mind be as easy, and the rise of nationalism caused the ecumenical movement within Germany to change dramatically. For Bonhoeffer, his involvement within his own church against the measures of the National Socialist government and the German Christians would severely limit his ecumenical involvement as he fought to resist the Aryan clauses.

Conclusion

During this time in the academic realm Bonhoeffer developed a good relationship with Karl Barth, saw him move farther away from the liberalism of his time, and his own work on the relationship between the church and state provided various impulses that caused him to reject the Aryan clause in 1933. Similarly, his various ministerial efforts also had a lasting effect upon him. His work with the Wedding confirmation class and his

⁶¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 253.

work with Charlottenburg youth club saw Bonhoeffer giving of himself to those that were very different from himself. This new found social concern in Bonhoeffer's sermons during this time period had a much stronger social and political awareness. Finally, Bonhoeffer's ecumenical efforts, which saw him reach out to the international world when much of Germany was heading towards hyper-nationalism, caused Bonhoeffer to come into conflict with the nationalistic liberalism of his day. Bonhoeffer's rejection of the "orders of creation", which was being used to justify racial and nationalistic aims, foreshadowed his efforts to reject those that attempted to implement the Aryan clause in 1933. As 1932 drew to a close, Bonhoeffer and his family experienced the final decline of the Weimar Republic and the rise of National Socialists to power in the early months of 1933.

CHAPTER FIVE

PROTESTING THE ARYAN CLAUSE IN 1933

In 1933 Bonhoeffer rejected the Aryan clause that was introduced by the National Socialists, and the majority of his activities within that year revolved around directly and indirectly objecting to it and its implementation within the German Protestant church. His rejection of the Aryan clause brought him into conflict with both the National Socialists and his own church. Throughout the turbulent months of 1933 Bonhoeffer's previous experiences enabled him to struggle against the Aryan clause.

The political situation within Germany had quickly changed in the last months of 1932 as the Weimar Republic began to collapse. The global economic instability combined with the inability of pro-democratic forces within Germany to create a situation in which no stable coalition could hold power. This was clearly demonstrated with the election results of November elections of 1932. Richard J. Evans explains that "Overall, the Reichstag was less manageable than before. One hundred communists now confronted 196 Nazis across the chamber, both intent on destroying a parliamentary system that they despised."¹ The result was that the Weimar parliamentary system became unmanageable as both National Socialists and the Communists saw political advantage in the demise of democracy. The result was that Franz von Papen was eventually forced to concede his position as Chancellor. After a short period of time, Adolf Hitler, on 30 January 1933, was given the position of Chancellor of Germany.² Even as Chancellor, Hitler did not have the ability to change things to his will and the

¹ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 300-301.

² Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 431.

will of his party. The act that allowed the National Socialists to gain power came a month later when the Reichstag burned down.

The ecclesiastical situation within the Protestant Church was also going through a time of transition. The rising popularity of the German Christians added a new element to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's rejection of the Aryan clause by causing Bonhoeffer not only to resist the efforts of the state from outside of the church, but also to resist support for the Aryan clause within the church itself. In addition to the German Christians, Bonhoeffer also had to struggle against the prevailing attitude within the Protestant church that the Aryan clause was not an issue of primary importance. Many people within the Protestant church saw the issues of church polity as a much more pressing issue. As well, many within the Protestant church did not wish to jeopardize the possibility of reaching out to the German people by rejecting the Aryan clause.

While the first three months of 1933 served as preparatory period for Bonhoeffer, his reaction to the Aryan clause occurred through three distinct phases in 1933. The first phase was his initial protest to the Aryan clause implemented by the State in April 1933. The second phase began in May and lasted until the end of August, wherein Bonhoeffer struggled to bring the Aryan clause and the Jewish question forward, while also resisting the German Christians attempt to control the church, which would result in the implementation of the Aryan clause within the church. The third phase revolved around Bonhoeffer's rejection of the Aryan clause in the month of September when both the regional and national synods met, and his efforts surrounding those events to keep the church from implementing the Aryan clause.

The Early Months of 1933

The early months of 1933 were a time of apprehension for Bonhoeffer, along with his family and close friends. The Bonhoeffer family bore witness to the demise of the Weimar Republic and the rise to power of the National Socialists. Bonhoeffer and his family found little in common with the new political power within Germany. As the preceding chapters have shown, the Bonhoeffers were not ultra-nationalists and they did not share in the anti-Semitic beliefs which were core beliefs of the National Socialists. The result was that the Bonhoeffer family found itself opposing the new regime.

While wary of Hitler and his party, the Bonhoeffers, like so many others, underestimated what Hitler would be able to accomplish and how long he would be in power. Bethge explains that “Unlike many people of their class, the Bonhoeffers viewed the events of 30 January seriously; they may have underestimated what Hitler was capable of doing, but not his unscrupulousness.”³ Bonhoeffer and his family were concerned that conditions within and without Germany would continue to deteriorate with Hitler in control, perhaps even to the point of another war starting.⁴ Not only did the Bonhoeffer family think that Hitler’s policies would force the country into another war, but they viewed Hitler with much concern. Karl Bonhoeffer was able to view Hitler’s rise to power through his perspective of a psychologist. Karl Bonhoeffer would recall,

In my own case, I disliked and mistrusted Hitler because of his demagogic propagandistic speeches...his habit of driving about the country carrying a riding crop, his choice of colleagues—with whose qualities, incidentally, we in Berlin were better acquainted with than people elsewhere—and finally because of what I heard from professional colleagues about his psychopathic symptoms.⁵

³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 257.

⁴ Bethge notes that “That evening Dietrich’s brother-in-law, Rüdiger Schleicher, returned home and announced: “This means war!” All of the Bonhoeffers, including Dietrich agreed.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 257.

⁵ Karl Bonhoeffer, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 258.

Karl Bonhoeffer would later reflect on that time stating, "From the start, we regarded National Socialism in 1933 and Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor as a misfortune—the entire family agreed on this."⁶ The Bonhoeffer family did not only view Hitler and the National Socialists as a threat to future of Germany, but also as a threat to their immediate family. Hitler and the National Socialists were not secretive about their anti-Semitic beliefs which were based in racial ideology. As a result any person of Jewish descent, regardless of religious affiliation, would be considered Jewish in the eyes of the National Socialists. Although the Aryan clause would not be implemented until April, the family knew that Gerhard and Sabine Leibholz would be directly affected by the attitudes of the fledgling government.

By 1933 all of Bonhoeffer's brothers and sisters were married, and he was the only unmarried member of his immediate family. The events of the early months of 1933 caused concern for Sabine Bonhoeffer, who in 1926 had married Gerhard Leibholz, a Christian with a Christian mother, but a Jewish father. This was not problematic for the Bonhoeffer family as no member of the immediate family had objected to the marriage. The Bonhoeffer family, however, was not ignorant of the latent and outright anti-Semitism that existed in German society. Elizabeth Raum explains that "When Dietrich's sister, Sabine, became engaged to Gerhard Leibholz in 1924, her mother talked to her at length about her choice...Paula Bonhoeffer knew that Sabine's life would not be easy for them in Germany."⁷ These fears were realized with the rise of the National Socialists to power.

⁶ Karl Bonhoeffer, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 258.

⁷ Raum, 36.

Although Gerhard and Sabine Leibholz were the members of the immediate family affected by the National Socialists anti-Semitic beliefs, others close to the family were also affected. As already mentioned Anneliese Schnurmann would flee Germany in the months to come and Franz Hildebrandt's future not only in Germany, but within the Protestant church would soon be threatened. Franz Hildebrandt was a close friend to Bonhoeffer and the entire Bonhoeffer family. Bonhoeffer and Franz Hildebrandt met at the end of his student years. Elizabeth Raum explains that

Dietrich introduced Franz, who was three years his junior, into the Bonhoeffer family, where he was warmly welcomed. For Franz, an only child, the Bonhoeffer brothers and sisters became like his own family, and he spent many Sunday afternoons relaxing at their homes. His love of music (Franz also played the piano expertly), his keen intelligence, and Dietrich's high regard for him brought him acceptance into the family to such a degree that Dietrich's nieces and nephews eventually called him "Uncle Franz."⁸

Not only was Hildebrandt a welcome friend to the Bonhoeffer family, but due to his ancestry he would be able to identify closely with Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, Gerhard Leibholz, since Hildebrandt came from a home where one parent was Jewish and one parent was Christian. Raum explains that "Hildebrandt, who had a Christian father and a Jewish mother was raised a Christian, attended seminary, and became a Protestant pastor. However, under Hitler's anti-Semitic policies, Franz was labelled a Jew."⁹ Gerhard Leibholz and Franz Hildebrandt were a constant reminder to Bonhoeffer about the affects of the Aryan clause upon his family and friends.

As in Bonhoeffer's early life, the experiences that came out of his family background caused him to reject the Aryan clause. No longer was the Bonhoeffer family only confronted with the National Socialist ideology and the coinciding anti-Semitic

⁸ Raum, 38.

⁹ Raum, 38.

attitudes that they had rejected in the past, but they were all faced with them impinging upon the family itself. The result was that Bonhoeffer did not reject the Aryan clause merely as in abstract concept, but as something that threatened his own family and close friends.

Even before Hitler had become Chancellor, Bonhoeffer had planned to discuss the emerging concept of the Führer¹⁰ on a radio, which he delivered 2 February 1933 entitled, “The Leader and the Individual in the Younger Generation.”¹¹ Although the radio address was scheduled before Hitler’s ascension to the position of Chancellor and Hitler’s name was not given in the speech, the content of the address does present some similarities between Bonhoeffer’s concept of “Führer” and to the new Chancellor. Overall, the broadcast was not a direct or a vehement attack upon Hitler, instead “The broadcast was extremely moderate in tone. He posed the question as to whether the popular desire for a leader represented a psychological need of youth or a political need of the nation as whole.”¹²

Bonhoeffer’s analysis had stemmed out of the changes in the concept of the “Führer” that had been developing since the end of the First World War, yet his argument was not rooted in democratic ideals, but from a conservative belief that authority was rooted in an office and not in a person.¹³ Another key point concerns the nature of the

¹⁰ The German title for Bonhoeffer’s radio address was “Der Führer unter der Einzelne in der Jungen Generation.” See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, ed. Eberhard Bethge et al., Vol. 12, *Barcelona, Berlin, Amerika: 1928-1931*, ed. Reinhard Staats and Hans Christoph von Hase (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1986-1999), 242.

¹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Leader and the Individual in the Younger Generation,” in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Fontana Library, 1970; Fontana Library, 1971), 188.

¹² Bosanquet, 112.

¹³ Bethge explains that “Bonhoeffer analyzed the development of the *Führer* concept and changes that it had undergone under in the postwar Youth movement... It would be a misinterpretation, however, to see his

relationship between the leader and the individual. Bonhoeffer was suggesting that in the youth movement, the leader is the only person with true freedom, as the other individuals submit their own wills to the leader.¹⁴ This was meant to be a warning that the Leader under these circumstances could easily gain unconditional power over his followers. The final point that Bonhoeffer makes is that the Leader is not the ultimate authority.

Bonhoeffer is drawing a clear limit to earthly authority, in order to remind people that only God is the ultimate authority.¹⁵ Bonhoeffer was writing to warn that any leader that would usurp and misuse his authority of the office of leadership or even worse, set himself up as a god, would in the end perish.

Bonhoeffer's radio address was cut off from the air while he was still reading his manuscript. The final warning about a leader usurping the power that belongs to God and the proper offices was not heard by the public. Bonhoeffer only realized this after talking with his family and as a result he contacted as many of his associates as possible to explain what had happened.¹⁶ Renate Wind notes that "Here unwittingly Dietrich had already given a description of the mass hysteria now beginning, which produced a collective flight from responsibility in the cult of the Führer."¹⁷ This radio address provides an example of Bonhoeffer addressing concerns about the social and political situation that surrounded him. The social awareness that he had developed through his school years and that had deepened during his time in America is evident here as he tried to warn his listeners about the radicalization of belief in the Führer.

argument based upon liberal, democratic ideas. It emerged from a conservative notion of order that continued to influence him." See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 259-260.

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, "The Leader and the Individual in the Younger Generation," 195.

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, "The Leader and the Individual in the Younger Generation," 199-200.

¹⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 259.

¹⁷ Wind, 46.

After Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave his radio address, he became wary of the ominous signs that were beginning to emerge as a result of the National Socialists gaining power. Although the National Socialists did not begin changing laws until March and April, there were early warning signs for those that were paying attention. When Adolf Hitler became Chancellor he was able to place a few of his close associates in positions of power. Particularly important was the promotion of Bernard Rust to the position of minister of education, because in early February Bernard Rust was appointed Prussian Minister of Education, which the Bonhoeffer family reacted to with alarm.¹⁸ This was largely due to Bernard Rust's attitudes and opinions that were rooted in a National Socialistic ideology.

Bonhoeffer and his family had their concerns accentuated with Bernard Rust's primary address as the minister of education. Bethge describes that, "Rust announced: 'Monday morning the Bolshevist cultural invasion will come to and end...I shall ask the churches outright whether or not they intend to help us in our fight against Bolshevism'."¹⁹ This statement implied that the state would soon be acting against a Bolshevist cultural invasion, which referred to Jews and Communists, and that the state would soon expect the church to support the state's actions. This directly affected the Bonhoeffer family in two distinct ways. The first is that Gerhard Leibholz would be considered to be a Jew by race in the view of the state due to his ancestry.²⁰ Similar fears were associated with Franz Hildebrandt. The second is that if the Nazi's were to interfere

¹⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 262.

¹⁹ *Völkischer Beobachter* 36/37 (5 June 1933), in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 262.

²⁰ Bethge writes, "Because of his Jewish ancestry, Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law Gerhard Leibholz couldn't take such remarks lightly, although no legal measures had been implemented." See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 262.

with the church, they would be interfering in the life and work of Bonhoeffer. The hyper-national and anti-Semitic views of the National Socialists clashed with Bonhoeffer, for he could not share such views due to his close friend, Franz Hildebrandt, and with his family.

Initial Protest of the Aryan Clause in April 1933

The boycott of Jewish businesses occurred on 1 April 1933 and was the first nationally coordinated anti-Semitic act by the National Socialist government. Although the boycott lasted only for a day, it revealed the anti-Semitic feeling of Hitler's government and showed the general attitude of the population. Richard J. Evans comments that "The general lack of public opposition to the action was striking, but so too was the general lack of public enthusiasm for it; a combination that was to be repeated more than once in subsequent years when the government launch anti-Semitic measures of sort or another."²¹ The Bonhoeffer family, however, was clearly against the boycott. Julie Bonhoeffer "at the age of ninety-one, marched past the S.A. cordons promoting the boycott of Jewish businesses on 1 April 1933, to shop at the Jewish-owned "Kaufhaus des Westens" on Tauentzienstrasse in Berlin."²² Julie Bonhoeffer's actions provided a model for the rest of the family to follow in not being complacent in regards to the maltreatment of people by the National Socialist government.

A second event of importance during the early days of April 1933 was the Reich conference. The first characteristic of this conference was the clear influence of the National Socialist party at the conference. On the 3-4 April 1933 the German Christians gathered to organize their efforts to bring the Protestant Church within Germany in step

²¹ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 436.

²² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 11.

with National Socialist ideology. Wilhelm Frick and Hermann Göring along with other National Socialist leaders appeared at the conference in order to party support for these initiatives.²³ The second characteristic of the conference was the theological direction of the conference that accepted the political and racial elements within National Socialism.²⁴ The overall result is summarized by the slogans of the conference which were “Gleichshaltung, the Führer principle, the Reich church, and racial conformity.”²⁵ These slogans became the driving forces for the German Christians as they sought to implement these ideas in the Protestant church.

The *Law for the Re-establishment of the Professional Civil Service* was passed into law on 7 April 1933. This law was established by Wilhelm Frick and Hermann Göring in order to remove all non-Aryans from the civil service. It was essentially an attempt to remove the Jews and anybody else that were considered to be enemies of the new government.²⁶ The most important aspect of the law in relation to this work is the third article that contains the Aryan clause. The third article states,

1. Officials, who are of non-Aryan descent, are to be retired; honorary officials are to be dismissed from office.
2. Section 1 does not apply to officials who were already in service on 1 August 1914, or fought in the world war at the front for the German Reich, or who fought

²³ Bethge explains that “The Reich conference of the German Christians on 3-4 April triggered radical changes at all levels of the church. Interior Minister [Wilhelm Frick and Hermann Göring made an appearance... The presence of the state commissars Leonardo Conti and Hans Hinkel strengthened the official character of the meeting. Some of the proceedings were broadcast.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 269.

²⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 269-270.

²⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 270.

²⁶ Hermann Göring and Wilhelm Frick designed the new legislation to “...purge the Civil Service of those elements which were politically most objectionable, but at the same time to cause minimum disruption in doing so... The law owed its title to an attempt by the Government to exploit an assertion by the Right in the Weimar period that the Left had filled the bureaucracy with unqualified people who carried the right party card. During the putting of the law into effect the assertion was shown that to be untrue. The law provided for the purging of Jews and known opponents of the regime, and for the retirement or transfer of officials for technical reasons which had been prevented by the Civil Service regulations.” See Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham eds., *Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945* (London: Johnathon Cape, 1974), 228-229.

for its allies, or whose fathers or sons were killed in the world war. The Reich minister of the Interior, with the agreement of the competent departmental minister, or of the highest authorities of the federal states, may permit further exceptions in the case of officials who are abroad.²⁷

This legislation had a bearing on Protestant ministers, since they were paid by the state.

The implication for the Protestant church was that non-Aryan ministers would fall under the new law.²⁸

Bonhoeffer initially responded to the Aryan clause in *Law for the Re-establishment of the Professional Civil Service* in an essay, *The Church and the Jewish Question*. Originally Bonhoeffer had been asked by Gerhard Jacobi to prepare a discussion paper for a group that met in Jacobi's home concerning the problems that would face the Jews, especially Christianized Jews, within the current situation.²⁹ This was before the Aryan clause was put into effect. Bonhoeffer was able to address the situation brought forward by the Aryan clause because he received advance warning about the new law due to Hans Dohnanyi, his brother-in-law, who worked in the upper levels of the Ministry of Justice.³⁰ The final result was that the essay was written with two distinct sections. The first section discusses the church in relation to the state. The second section deals with the effects of the Aryan clause upon the church, and the church's response to the situation. Initially Bonhoeffer set out to focus solely on the second section, but due to actions of the National Socialists he added the first section.³¹

²⁷ Noakes and Pridham, 229-300.

²⁸ Originally a non-Aryan was defined as a person who had at least one Jewish grandparent, but would later be broadened to include anyone married to someone considered to be Jewish. See Noakes and Pridham, 300.

²⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 272.

³⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 272.

³¹ Bonhoeffer actually worked on the second section of the thesis first during the end of March and the beginning of April 1933. The first section of the papers was written during the boycott of Jewish businesses and the impending delivery of the Aryan clause, which Bonhoeffer had foreknowledge about because of his brother-in-law Hans Dohnanyi. See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 273.

The essay is a clear rejection of the Aryan clause, but it is a point of contention for many scholars. Although scholars agree that *The Church and the Jewish Question* is Bonhoeffer's initial rejection of the Aryan clause, there are scholars that see the essay as problematic. The first issue for the contemporary interpreter is that Bonhoeffer uses the term "Jewish Question" and uses traditional Christian language concerning the Jews. The second issue for some scholars is that Bonhoeffer is not critical enough of the traditional Lutheran view of church and state.

There are scholars that view the essay as a failure to address adequately the plight of the Jews due to its acceptance of the states' ability to address the "Jewish Question" and its "anti-Semitic" phrases.³² Kenneth C. Barnes represents this position as he writes, "Bonhoeffer's argument cancels itself out by his contradictory presentation. For each argument for church action he presented a counter-argument which invalidated that action. With his expression of Christian solidarity with the suffering Jews came the Christian anti-Semitic rationale used to justify persecution of the Jews."³³

A more moderate position suggests that while using latent anti-Semitic remarks, Bonhoeffer's essay does express his rejection of the Aryan clause and concern for the plight of the Jews. Ruth Zerner's essay, "Church, State, and the 'Jewish Question'" encapsulates this position, as she explains that "Although unequivocal in his stand against the exclusion of baptised Jews from the Christian ministry, Bonhoeffer penned several equivocal and problematic paragraphs in his first essay concerning church responses to

³² Bonhoeffer does use traditional Christian language concerning the Jews within his essay. He writes, "The church of Christ has never lost sight of the thought that the 'chosen people,' who nailed the redeemer of the world to the cross, must bear the curse for its actions through a long history of suffering... The conversion of Israel, that is to be the end of the people's suffering." See Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question," 222.

³³ Barnes, 116.

the state's Jewish policies."³⁴ Zerner's analysis of Bonhoeffer's actions is rooted in her own context, as she explains,

Bonhoeffer clearly separated the Christian church's attitude towards the new political problems of Jews in general from the special problems of baptised Jews within the Christian church. Moreover he thrust the entire Jewish policy first against the backdrop of church-state relations and then against a wider historical and eschatological horizon. In neither framework are his arguments convincing or compatible with contemporary, post-Holocaust political and theological perspectives.³⁵

Zerner's position is representative of those that interpret Bonhoeffer from a contemporary perspective. The reality is that Bonhoeffer's perspective in April 1933 did not possess any knowledge of the Holocaust or post-Holocaust perspectives and attitudes. It is within his own contextual framework that Bonhoeffer rejects the Aryan clause. Although he used terms and ideas that have become outdated and even problematic to the contemporary interpreter, the underlying spirit and intent of Bonhoeffer is a clear and complete rejection of the Aryan clause and its implementation within the Protestant church.

A more positive view of *The Church and the Jewish Question* is propounded by Alejandro Zorzin. Zorzin focuses on Bonhoeffer's ideas of having the church questioning the states' actions, of having the church stand beside the oppressed, and of having the church keeping its mission to the Jews open.³⁶ Zorzin views "The Church and Jewish Question" as having insights that have implications for the human rights in the world

³⁴ Ruth Zerner, "Church, State and the 'Jewish Question'," 193.

³⁵ Ruth Zerner, "Church, State and the 'Jewish Question'," 193

³⁶ Zorzin, 240-257.

today.³⁷ Similarly, Bethge views the essay as a clear attempt by Bonhoeffer to reject the Aryan clause. Bethge explains that

On the surface the traditional doctrine of the two realms seems scarcely to have been analyzed and the theory of the curse for crucifying the saviour seems not to have been questioned. Nevertheless, a more careful reading shows that those uncritical notions are definitely not the central theme of the paper and that they are already in the process of being transcended. Those concepts were not employed in order to justify or condone the social disenfranchisement of the Jews; on the contrary, they were used to fight this disenfranchisement and discrimination.³⁸

Bethge's explanation is valid and it takes into account the whole essay rather than parts of the essay. This work will take a similar view towards Bonhoeffer's essay. A comprehensive look at the essay will show that it is a clear rejection of the Aryan clause and that its intention was to oppose the actions of the state.

The Church and the Jewish Question was Bonhoeffer's attempt to address his view of the "Jewish Question." Bonhoeffer introduced his essay acknowledging that the new legislation affected the Jews due to their race and not due to their religious beliefs and that this raised new issues for theologians. The first issue raised is the church's attitude to the state's action and the church's response to the state's action. The second issue focuses on the attitude that the church towards Christianized Jews. Ultimately Bonhoeffer believed that these issues needed to be rooted in a proper understanding of the church.³⁹ The "Jewish Question" for Bonhoeffer is rooted within these issues, not in

³⁷ Zorzin writes, "The reflections on the 'Jewish question' should serve as a paradigm to make our churches conscious of the problem, especially in situations of "low intensity democracies" being subjected to structural adjustment policies." See Zorzin, 257.

³⁸ Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews," 61.

³⁹ Bonhoeffer writes, "The fact, unique in history, that the Jew has been made subject to special laws by the state solely because of the race to which he belongs and quite apart from his religious beliefs, raises two new problems for the theologian, which must be examined separately. What is the church's attitude to this action by the state? And what should the church do as a result of it? That is one question. The other is, what attitude should the church take on its members who are baptized Jews? Both questions can only be answered in the light of the true concept of the church." See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the

the National Socialist anti-Semitism that viewed the Jews as a “race of parasites”⁴⁰ and viewed that the “‘solution of the Jewish Question’...could only be solved by ‘brute force’.”⁴¹

In the first section of the essay Bonhoeffer discusses the relationship between the church and state in regards to the Jewish question. Bonhoeffer begins the first section of his essay by affirming that the Church does not have the right to interfere with the state.⁴² Although Bonhoeffer is attempting to maintain the Lutheran belief in the two realms of church and state, he is doing so in reaction to the desire of the German Christians to have the Protestant church acquiesce its independence from the state. This is seen in some of his earlier essay “What is the Church?” wherein Bonhoeffer asserts that the church must stay out of party politics. This is contrary to the analysis that Bonhoeffer was empowering the state’s persecution of non-Aryans through the realms of church and state.⁴³ In fact, Bonhoeffer makes it clear that the church does not have to praise or censure the laws of the state. Bonhoeffer then goes on to describe the role of the state from the view point of the church. Bonhoeffer notes that the state is fully capable of producing historical action, but the church as witness to Jesus Christ in history is able to interpret history correctly, and allows the state to continue to set forth history.⁴⁴

Bonhoeffer then brings the issue of the Jewish question into consideration:

Without doubt the Jewish question is one of the historical problems which our state must deal with, and without doubt the state is justified in adopting new methods here. It remains the concern of humanitarian associations and individual

Jewish Question”, in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, Volume 1, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge. New York: Collins, Fontana Press, 1971, 218.

⁴⁰ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 174.

⁴¹ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 174.

⁴² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question”, 218.

⁴³ See Ruth Zerner, “Church, State and the ‘Jewish Question’.”

⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” 218-219.

Christians who feel themselves called to the task, to remind the state of the moral side of any of its measures, i.e. on occasions to accuse the state of offences against morality.⁴⁵

Although using the phrase “Jewish Question” has a negative connotation due to the systematic and deliberate maltreatment of the Jews that culminated in the Holocaust and may seem to be obviously anti-Semitic to the contemporary interpreter of Bonhoeffer, as mentioned previously Bonhoeffer’s view of the “Jewish Question” was different than that of the state. More important is his view that both humanitarian groups and individual Christians can choose to question the state and question the morality of the state’s decisions at any time. This concept of individual Christians becoming politically and socially active in defence of others came out of his time in America where he was introduced to social theology. Although Bonhoeffer had a level of social awareness during his initial university years, it was his interaction with professors like Reinhold Niebuhr that challenged him to consider the social and political aspects of issues. In the years preceding 1933, Bonhoeffer demonstrated this new awareness through his involvement with the Wedding confirmation class, the Charlottenburg youth club and through his politically aware sermons. Therefore, it is not out of character for Bonhoeffer to suggest that individual Christians be willing to protest the Aryan clause.

Bonhoeffer asserts the role of the church is different than that of humanitarian groups or individuals.⁴⁶ If Bonhoeffer ended his essay at this point, it could be said that he was willing to allow the church to be silent on the Jewish question and leave any response to the state to individuals and humanitarian groups. This, however, is not the case. Bonhoeffer continues, “But that does not mean that it [the church] lets political action slip by

⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” 219.

⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” 219.

disinterestedly; it can and should, precisely because it does not moralise in individual instances, continually ask the state whether its action can be justified as legitimate action of the state, i.e. as action which leads to law and order, and not to lawlessness and disorder.”⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer asserts that in certain issues, the church is obligated to ask the state if an action is legitimate if it would create lawlessness and disorder.⁴⁸ This is Bonhoeffer’s argument for the church to comment on the state’s handling of the Jewish question. He is noting that church can aid the state in regards to the Jewish question since it is essentially a moral question that is province of the church and by doing so the state can focus on its role in preserving the world.⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer then goes on to claim that the church is obligated to confront the state not only if there is too little law and order,⁵⁰ but also when there is too much law and order. Bonhoeffer asserts that the present situation reflected the situation when the state was introducing too much law and order.⁵¹ This point is reached when the state has passed laws that hinder the proclamation of the Word of God and interfere with Christian faith and its missional mandate. He also notes that at this time the state becomes illegitimate by interfering in the affairs of the church.

The church is then forced to respond to this encroachment of the state.

Bonhoeffer then goes on to explore the various possibilities that are available to the church in such circumstance. He suggests that

All this means that there are three possible ways in which the church can act towards the state: in the first place, as has been said, it can ask the state whether its actions are legitimate and in accordance with its character as state, i.e. it can throw the state back on its responsibilities. Secondly, it can aid the victims of state action. The church has an unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering

⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” 219.

⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” 219-220.

⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” 220.

⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” 220.

⁵¹ Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” 220-221.

of society, even if they do not belong to the Christian community. "Do good to all men." In both these courses of action, the church serves the state in its free way, and at times when laws are changed the church may in no way withdraw itself from these two tasks. The third possibility is not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself. Such action would be direct political action, and is only possible and demanded when the church sees the state fail in its function of creating law and order, i.e. when it sees the state unrestrainedly bring about too much or too little law and order.⁵²

These three responses stake out a bold process of action for the church within the context of the National Socialist regime, even in its early days. The first course of action seems to be quite straightforward, as it suggests that the church remind the state to act within appropriate parameters. The second course of action that Bonhoeffer recommends extends beyond the first course of action, as it requires the church to help any group oppressed by the state, even if they are not Christian. He also makes it quite clear that the church is responsible for the first two options at all times.

The third course of action is the most extreme as it demands that the church take direct action contrary to the state when the state is failing to either extreme in regards to too little or too much order. Bonhoeffer argues,

In these cases it must see the existence of the state, and with it its own existence, threatened. There would be too little law if any group of subjects were deprived of their rights, too much where the state intervened in the character of the church and its proclamation, e.g. in the forced exclusion of baptised Jews from our Christian congregations or in the prohibition of mission to the Jews. Here the Christian church would find *in statu confessionis* and here the state would be in the act of negating itself. A state which includes within itself a terrorized church has lost its most faithful servant. But even this third action of the church, which on occasion leads to conflict with the existing state, is only the paradoxical expression of its ultimate recognition of the state; indeed, the church itself knows itself to be called here to protect the state *qua* state from itself and to preserve it. In the Jewish problem the first two possibilities will be the compelling demands of the hour. The necessity of direct political action by the church is, on the other hand, to be decided at any time by an "Evangelical Council" and cannot therefore ever be casuistically decided beforehand.⁵³

⁵² Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question," 221.

⁵³ Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question", 221-222.

This third action is the most extreme of the possible steps that Bonhoeffer believes the church can take in response to the state, as it introduces the concept of *status confessionis*, which would become prevalent in Bonhoeffer's action in the months to come as he proposed the National Socialist government had through the Aryan clause threatened the existence of the church and as a result, the church needed to enter into direct political action against the state. Stephen Plant explains that "For Bonhoeffer, erecting a racial criterion for participation in the Church created a 'status confessionis,' that is confronted the Church with a theological heresy so significant that Christians could not accept it without denying their confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. A church that accepted such a policy removed itself from God's blessing."⁵⁴

Bonhoeffer attempts to directly relate how the church can respond to the states actions towards Judaism. This portion of Bonhoeffer's essay as previously mentioned is Bonhoeffer writes,

Now the measures of the state towards Judaism in addition stand in a quite special context for the church. The church of Christ has never lost sight of the thought that the "chosen people", who nailed the redeemer of the world to the cross, must bear the curse for its action through a long history of suffering... But the history of the suffering of this people, loved and punished by God, stands under the sign of the final home-coming of the people of Israel to its God. And this home-coming happens in the conversion of Israel to Christ... The conversion of Israel, that is to be the end of the people's period of suffering. From here the Christian church sees the history of the people of Israel with trembling as God's own, free, fearful way with his people. It knows that no nation of the world can be finished with this mysterious people, because God is not yet finished with it.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Stephen Plant, *Bonhoeffer* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 23.

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question", 222-223.

Bonhoeffer is making two claims in this portion of his essay.⁵⁶ The first is that the church needs to continue its mission to the Jews. Although after the Holocaust the Christian church has had to rethink its attitude towards the Jews as recipients of missionary endeavours, Bonhoeffer was dealing with a different issue within his historical circumstance. He was objecting to the idea that having Jewish converts in the Protestant church within Germany would somehow be a stumbling block to Germans coming back to the church. Although Bonhoeffer uses traditional Christian concepts at this point like the concept of the Jews bearing a curse and the need for Jews to become Christians, he is in fact trying to prevent Germans Jew from being treated as an inferior in the eyes of the Protestant church.

The second claim from this portion of the essay is that the Jewish people cannot be rejected by the state. Bonhoeffer is pointing out that when Jews become Christians the church must fully embrace them as fellow members of the church. This clearly is in opposition to those who desired to remove Jewish Christians from the church and who desired to see race as a basis for the church within Germany, as each

new attempt to solve the Jewish problem comes to nothing on the saving-historical significance of this people; nevertheless, such attempts must continually be made. This consciousness on the part of the church of the curse that bears down upon this people, raises it far above any cheap moralising; instead, as it looks at the rejected people, it humbly recognises itself as a church continually unfaithful to its Lord and looks full of hope those of the people of Israel who have come home, to those who have come to believe in the one true God in Christ, and knows itself to be bound to them in brotherhood.⁵⁷

Bonhoeffer is clearly stating that the state cannot declare itself finished with the Jews, and as a result, the state should not act as it was finished with the Jews. This concludes the first

⁵⁶ This is the section of the essay that contains traditional Christian language and concepts concerning the Jews. While Bonhoeffer uses these terms, he does not use them in order to justify them. Instead he uses these terms as part of the mental framework of his time period to state clearly the Church cannot support any persecution of the Jews and the Church cannot stop it mission to the Jews.

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question," 222-223.

part of Bonhoeffer's essay, as he moves onto discussing the situation of Christianized Jews in the present context.

The second part of *The Church and the Jewish Question* gives Bonhoeffer's opinion of the state's action as it related to the Jewish question. Bonhoeffer asserts that state had no right to set parameters that would affect the members of the church. He notes that the church had its own point of view in dealing with the Jewish question, noting that Judaism for the church is a religious question, not a racial question.⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer then goes on to describe the traditional biblical view of Jewish Christians against the misrepresentation of the term Jewish Christian in his own era.⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer then shows how those in his own era that would reject those of Jewish descent that were Christians were actually committing the same heresy of the Jewish Christians in the first century by using race as criteria for full acceptance into the church.⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer was sensitive to a racial division in the church for various reasons. Bonhoeffer had seen the negative effects of racist thinking during his time spent in America, especially its effect upon the church. As well, the Aryan legislation and the prejudices behind it threatened people within Germany: his family and his good friend, Franz Hildebrandt.

Bonhoeffer goes to describe the necessity of having a single Protestant church within Germany that would not be divided by race, as he states,

What is at stake is by no means the question whether our German members of congregations can still tolerate church fellowship with the Jews. It is rather the task of Christian preaching to say: here is the church, where Jew and German stand together under the Word of God; here is the proof either a church is still the church or not. No one who feels able to tolerate church fellowship with Christians of Jewish race can be prevented from separating himself from this church fellowship. But it must then be made clear to him with utmost seriousness that he is

⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question," 223.

⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question," 223-224.

⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question," 224.

thus loosing himself from the place on which the church of Christ stands and that he is thus bringing to reality the Jewish-Christian idea of a religion based on law, i.e. is falling into modern Jewish Christianity. It still always remains an open question whether such a separation can or cannot be regarded as a tolerable schism. But one must have an extraordinarily restricted view not to see that attitude of our church towards the baptised Jews among our church people, other than that described above would meet with widespread misunderstanding.⁶¹

Bonhoeffer is further stressing his point that it would be inappropriate for the church to embrace a concept that would divide the church according to race. Bonhoeffer goes on to note that anything other than a clear rejection of the Aryan clause in regards to the church would cause confusion in the church. Bonhoeffer then concludes his essay by quoting Martin Luther's exposition on Psalm 110.3 that asserts that the only requirement for admission into the church is to "accept word of the Lord, teach it purely and confess against those who persecute it, and for that reason suffer what is their due."⁶² Bonhoeffer is clear in staking out his position that the only measure of whether or not someone is a Christian is their acceptance of the Word of God, and the measure for the church is whether or not it teaches and confesses the Word of God regardless of any persecution that may come as a result.

The Church and the Jewish Question was Bonhoeffer's first attempt to address the issues surrounding the Aryan clause. Although some modern interpreters dislike how Bonhoeffer presented the content of the essay, it can be clearly seen that Bonhoeffer viewed that the church needed to confront the state on the issue and the church could not turn its back on its Jewish members. Also important is that "The Church and the Jewish Question" is a clear rejection of the Aryan clause and its implementation in the Protestant church. This essay was only the beginning of Bonhoeffer's efforts concerning the Aryan

⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question," 225.

⁶² Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question," 225.

clause. As the months progressed the situation changed and he became embroiled in the Aryan clause in different ways. During the summer months Bonhoeffer not only took an academic approach to the issue, but also became involved in the efforts against the German Christian and their agenda that would see the Aryan clause implemented within the church.

The Struggle against the German Christians in the Summer of 1933

After the Aryan clause was legislated in April 1933 and Bonhoeffer's initial essay rejected the Aryan clause, his energies shifted to keep the anti-Semitic legislation from affecting the church. This proved difficult as there were many within the Protestant church who were willing to accept the principles of National Socialism. Although the German Christians supported the Aryan clause within the Protestant church, there were others that viewed the Aryan clause as a minor issue. Even if they were opposed to the German Christians they were more concerned with ensuing struggle over the church leadership. Bonhoeffer was part of a small minority that viewed that Aryan clause as an issue of primary importance.

In the month of May 1933 others began to step forward to protest against the Aryan clause and to reject the German Christians. The largest of these groups was the Young Reformation Movement. Although not as outspoken at this time as other groups, it was this group that provided leadership to the opposition during the early summer months. Bonhoeffer joined in the Young Reformation Movement in May along with others in Berlin like Martin Niemöller. An important point is that the Berlin members added an appendix to their manifesto that noted their independence and their more

theological direction.⁶³ Solidarity within the Young Reformation movement did not last long as some members were quickly attracted to the conservatism promised by the National Socialists. Many Young Reformation members were conservative and were not fond of the old church and interested in a new sort of church.⁶⁴ Although some of the Young Reformation members would leave in May, the organization remained an active opposition body throughout the summer months.

The Young Reformation movement became involved in the church struggle almost immediately as the last part of the May 1933 involved the election of a leader of the Reich church. The Young Reformer's helped aid Bishop Friedrich von Bodelschwingh to become elected Reich Bishop on 27 May 1933, but this brought them into disagreement with the German Christians that had supported Ludwig Müller's bid for the position.⁶⁵ The events surrounding the 27 May 1933 election of Reich bishop, especially the machinations of the German Christians, provided the context for Bonhoeffer's next sermon. He preached on the Golden Calf on 28 May 1933 at Wilhelm Memorial Church, warning his audience not to be taken in by those that would glorify and worship any person or thing, instead of the Lord. He also warned that the clergy were being asked to forsake the Word of God and instead proclaiming a false human centered religion. In this portion of the sermon Bonhoeffer proclaims that

The priest is not driven out, he is told "Do your duty!" "Preserve religion for the people, give them worship services." They really want to remain a church with gods and priests and religions, but a church of Aaron—without God... Church of the priests against church of the Word, church of Aaron against church of

⁶³ The people that would form the Berlin part of the Young Reformation movement added a theological oriented appendix to the Young Reformation manifesto. The original Young Reformation manifesto did mention the Aryan clause, by clearly rejecting it, but the Berlin appendix added "terms like "abuse" and "leading astray"." See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 281.

⁶⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 282.

⁶⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 282.

Moses—this historical clash at the foot of Sinai, the end of the worldly church and the appearance of the Word of God, repeats itself in our church, day by day, Sunday by Sunday. Time and again we come together for worship as a worldly church, as a church which will not wait, which will not live for the invisible; as a church which makes its own gods; as a church which wants to have the sort of god which pleases it and will not ask how it pleases God; as a church which is ready for any sacrifice in the name of idolatry, in the divinization of human thoughts and values; as a church which appropriates to itself divine authority in the priesthood. And we should go away again as a church which must hear a fresh, “I am the Lord your God...,” as a church which is humbled as it is faced with this Word, as the church of Moses, the church of Word.⁶⁶

Bonhoeffer is comparing the church of German Christians with the assembly that requested Aaron to worship a false god. In addition he is conveying a warning against requesting a religion that is not of the Lord, but is built by the felt needs of the people. Also one cannot overlook the fact that Bonhoeffer is using a contrast between Moses and Aaron to prove his point. By using Moses, a central human figure in Jewish history, Bonhoeffer publicly was proclaiming the association Christianity with its Jewish roots. This reiterates Bonhoeffer’s unwillingness to reject the Old Testament as authoritative, as he did during his university years. This sermon demonstrates Bonhoeffer’s willingness to address the social and political issues of his day, as learned through his experience in America.

Bonhoeffer’s efforts to keep the Aryan clause from being implemented within the Protestant church continued in the weeks to come. As time went on, some argued that the Aryan clause should be accepted within the Protestant church so that Aryan Germans would not be hindered in returning to the faith. The 22 June 1933 there was a meeting in the new assembly hall at the University of Berlin. The topic of the meeting was to discuss

⁶⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “A Church of the World or a Church of the Word?” in *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelley and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 223-234.

was the “Struggle for the Church.”⁶⁷ Bonhoeffer was speaking on behalf of the Young Reformation members at this along with those that represented the Catholic Centre Party and others that represented the German Christians.⁶⁸ The minutes from the meeting state that

Lic. Bonhoeffer discussed the meaning of the struggle...Once again the contrast in Romans 14 between the strong in faith and the weak in faith becomes apparent. Someone strong in faith did not expel the others; the weak in faith was the person who barred people from the community. Today the weak in faith had introduced a racial law. The strength of the others would now consist in being open to the cause of the weak who were the active ones, the reformers. (The substance of the church is at stake in the tension between the strong and weak.)...Today too there was a need for a council. Its decisions should be binding. (Everyone must be legitimated in light of the Confession.) The last possibility open to Protestantism was schism. Now the Confession was at stake. There were two points of doctrine to be decided: the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of Creation.⁶⁹

In addition to the minutes of the Conference, the Junge Kirche also made a report that describes Bonhoeffer's position. The report states:

The greatest impact on the meeting were the words of Licentiate Bonhoeffer when he pointed to the possibilities and limitations of a struggle within the church...Those who were weak in faith, who wanted to set up a law like the Aryan clause before the doorway to the church, had to be borne by those who were strong in faith, as stated in Romans 14. If the law established by the weak really became the law of the church, the decision could be given only to a Protestant council...This Protestant council would then have to decide about the unity and schism of the church.⁷⁰

It is from this meeting that it is possible to develop an understanding of Bonhoeffer's position at this point. The first point that Bonhoeffer mentions is the awareness of the struggle taking place within the church that was divided.⁷¹ The second point that Bonhoeffer is making is that the “weak” were trying to impose their will upon the

⁶⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 287.

⁶⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 287.

⁶⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 287.

⁷⁰ Junge Kirche, no. 2, (30 June 1933), 22-23, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). 288.

⁷¹ Bethge writes, “Bonhoeffer's serious conviction that the struggle was taking place within a still divided church.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 288.

“strong” with the Aryan clause, and that theologians were now trying to justify this position.⁷² The third point is that Bonhoeffer was adamant that if the Aryan clauses were implemented then the “weak” would cause a schism of the church, and the means to prevent this was to convene a council to discuss the merit of the basis of the decision to reject the Aryan clause.⁷³ This shows the evolution of Bonhoeffer’s thought as the tumultuous events of 1933 swirled around him. It was becoming more and more clear that Bonhoeffer was not in line with the liberalism of his day. Bethge explains that “In fact, Bonhoeffer, though thoroughly shaped by a liberal tradition, was growing anti-liberal. His instincts were certain now, in 1933, respectable political and theological liberalism was digging its own grave because it was leaving the decisions to the tyrant, out of superciliousness or merely a weak laissez-faire attitude.”⁷⁴ Although Bonhoeffer may have wished otherwise he was no longer in the stream of thought as the majority of liberal German Protestants within Germany. His education and life experience had pulled him away from its previous limitations and now the limitations of German liberalism were being amplified in its refusal to come to grips with the Aryan clause. Bethge comments that “In his writings of 1932 and 1933 Bonhoeffer proposed to his own church and to the ecumenical movement that they should rediscover ‘council’, ‘heresy’, ‘confession’, and ‘doctrinal decision’—and this at the time when scepticism was

⁷² Bethge writes, “During the preceding weeks theologians had consulted the Bible to see if it presented any opportunity of permitting acceptance of the Aryan clause. Increasingly the argument was being made that, for the sake of the weak in faith, it might actually be possible to eliminate the offense of racial non-conformity in certain members of community by establishing new groups. Bonhoeffer unmasked this argument a trick of the “weak” who had not yet succeeded in making their wish become the heretical law of the “strong”. See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 288.

⁷³ Bethge writes, “A triumph of the “weak” would lead to schism. Here Bonhoeffer introduced the idea of conciliar decision. To most in the audience the idea must have seemed archaic...But this was the point in Bonhoeffer’s speech, more than any other that was talked about.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 288.

⁷⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 288-289.

paralyzing those with more experience. His elders looked upon the younger man as a mere visionary.”⁷⁵

Although the meeting on 22 June 1933 is an important window in the Bonhoeffer’s views about the Aryan clause, other events had an impact during this time. On 18 June 1933, Franz Hildebrandt was ordained but “Now his worried friends wondered what this ordination meant in a church that had accommodated itself to Nazism and was issuing decrees on ‘racial conformity’ that would legally exclude the newly ordained man from the ministry.”⁷⁶ The fears that had begun with Adolf Hitler’s rise to the position of Chancellor and had elevated through the passing the Aryan clause by the state were now beginning to directly impact Bonhoeffer’s close friend. The result was that Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt “argued that this organization could not be called a ‘church’ and that words alone would not suffice. Sooner than might have been expected they seemed to have reached the point of a possible *status confessionis*, which the students had only nervously hinted at during their demonstration.”⁷⁷

More dark signs were about to arise with further state interference within the church. On 24 June 1924 the state intentionally intervened directly into the Protestant church with the appointment of August Jäger as state commissioner for all Protestant churches in Prussia.⁷⁸ This was problematic since it involved the National Socialists interfering directly into the affairs of the Protestant church. Ernst Helmreich writes, “When Jäger was appointed head of the Prussian churches, Bodelschwingh felt he could no longer carry out his duties any longer, and on June 24 withdrew from his office as

⁷⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 289.

⁷⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 292.

⁷⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 292.

⁷⁸ Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches Under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 137.

bishop.”⁷⁹ Not only did Jäger’s appointment result in the resignation of Bodelschwingh, but it also resulted in drastic changes in the church government. Concerning Jäger’s immediate actions, Helmreich describes that “The same day he dissolved the representative bodies of the various churches in Prussia...The superintendents general of the Provincial churches were replaced by new church commissioners.”⁸⁰

The actions of the state drew a large protest, as “The unrest in the churches assumed the proportion of an avalanche. Protest delegations and teachers traveled to Berlin and converged on the Reich chancellery. Bonhoeffer composed a ‘Declaration of the Ministers of Greater Berlin’ that was concluded on 6 July and sent, with 106 signatures to the Reich chancellor.”⁸¹ Eventually the public outcry was so great and state commissars did resign, but the National Socialists had worked quickly to redraft the constitution of the church and have church elections. Helmreich explains that “On his [Hitler’s] instructions Müller hastily constructed a new constitutional committee...It was largely a matter of putting the Loccum Manifest into constitutional form. By July 11 the drafted document was signed by representatives of all the German Land churches.”⁸² This was the last step before the next round of church elections, as “On 14 July Hitler proclaimed that work on the constitution was complete. Soon afterward, on 23 July, he made the surprise announcement of general church elections.”⁸³ The state commissars and the suspensions of the various superintendents had already been lifted before the

⁷⁹ Helmreich, 137.

⁸⁰ Helmreich, 140.

⁸¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 291.

⁸² Helmreich, 140.

⁸³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 291.

announcement of church elections.⁸⁴ Bonhoeffer realized that the victory seemed unlikely before the church elections took place. He voiced his concern in letter to Sutz:

I have little doubt that the German Christians will emerge victorious and that because of this, the outlines of the new church will very quickly be revealed. Consequently, it will be very questionable whether we can continue as a church. I fear, however, that there will be a gradual but constant breaking up, since one no longer has the strength for united action. Then it goes back to the assembly.⁸⁵

Although Bonhoeffer was correct in his assessment that the German Christians would be victorious at the July church elections, he continued to resist their advance. Bonhoeffer knew that if the German Christians were victorious they would not hesitate to implement the state approved Aryan clause in the church.

The short time between the announcement of elections and the day of the actual elections was not enough time to establish an effective opposition. Helmreich explains that "An electoral period of only eight days had been allowed, which meant that the German Christians and the National Socialists immediately went into high gear. Anyone could vote who had a baptismal certificate or paid a church tax."⁸⁶ This was especially advantageous to the German Christians who swelled church numbers and with the relatively simple voting requirements, which allowed the election to go their way in most cases. The lack of time to prepare was particularly difficult for the opposition.⁸⁷

Bonhoeffer became extremely active in opposing the German Christians during the

⁸⁴ J. S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933-45* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1968), 41.

⁸⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, 17 July 1933," in *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelley and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 433-434.

⁸⁶ Helmreich, 141-142.

⁸⁷ Helmreich notes that "In fact, there was not real opposition party. Single lists were often put up by general agreement, usually allotting about three-fourths of the seats to known German Christians. Since in such cases there were no opposing lists, and there were no need for elections. In the whole state of Württemberg and in Schleswig-Holstein, for example there was no balloting." See Helmreich, 142.

election period, even to the point of cancelling his Christology lectures during the week before the election.⁸⁸

Bonhoeffer attempted to aid in preparing election leaflets and helping organize a list of opposition candidates. A complication came about when the Gestapo raided the Young Reformation office in Dahlem.⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer responded by attempting to get the leaflets back and by protesting the interference of the Gestapo in the church elections. Bonhoeffer and Gerhard Jacobi eventually convinced Rudolph Diels, the head of the Gestapo, to allow them to return the flyers as long as they changed the name of the opposition to “Gospel and Church” instead of “List of the Evangelical Church.”⁹⁰ In addition to the compromise of title and content, both Bonhoeffer and Gerhard Jacobi were responsible for the agreement. Bethge notes that “Diels made both men responsible for the strict observance of the agreement; if any leaflets appeared with the old or similar slogans or if they libeled the German Christians, Bonhoeffer and Jacobi would be liable for arrest.”⁹¹ In fact, in the weeks to come Bonhoeffer had to let people know that he had not been sent to a concentration camp.⁹² This is a clear example of the risks that Bonhoeffer was taking in protesting the German Christian and their agenda of implementing the Aryan clause.

The results of the election did not surprise Bonhoeffer, but they were discouraging all the same. Helmreich gives the following description of the overwhelming victory by the German Christian: “The election on July 23, 1933, resulted

⁸⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 295.

⁸⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 295.

⁹⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 295.

⁹¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 295.

⁹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, 6 November 1933”, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 296.

in the German Christians winning about two thirds of the seats; the strong Bavarian church was not captured by the German Christians, but the provincial synod of Westphalia was the only synod in the Old Prussian Union where the Gospel and Church list won a majority (80-60).⁹³ The effect of the elections is that the people had decided to support strongly the German Christians and the opponents of the German Christians began to criticize the election.⁹⁴ Another result is that Ludwig Müller had been made president of the Old Prussian Union Church, which meant that concepts like the leadership principle and acceptance of anti-Semitic legislation were being enforced.⁹⁵ The struggle surrounding the church election bears witness to Bonhoeffer's willingness to stand against elements within and without the church that were willing to implement the Aryan clause. Bonhoeffer's willingness to stand by the weak was evident during this period as he committed himself to struggling against the German Christians, even to the point of going and confronting the head of the Gestapo over the election leaflets. Bonhoeffer also attempted to confront the German Christians theologically. The opposition forces were looking to continue their struggle against the German Christians, as they would focus on criticizing the beliefs of the German Christians.⁹⁶ The next step for Bonhoeffer and his colleagues was to discuss confessional issues, which would lead

⁹³ Helmreich, 143.

⁹⁴ Helmreich writes, "The people had spoken. For the moment there was not much criticism, but gradually churchmen realized how much external influence there had been and what the results were apt to be, those opposed to the German Christians regularly denounced the elections." See Helmreich, 143.

⁹⁵ Bethge explains "In the Old Prussian Union Church, Müller was made president of the High Church Council with the title of bishop. In keeping with the leadership principle, he was also invested with supreme powers enabling him to exercise the authority of the High Church Council independently. Thus the "leadership principle" and "racial conformity" were already being enforced" See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 297.

⁹⁶ Bethge writes, "The events of the 23 July election had decided the question of power in the church, but not the question of truth" See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 297.

to the attempt to create the Bethel Confession.⁹⁷ For Dietrich Bonhoeffer the latter half of the month of August involved working on the Bethel Confession. The confession had to cover a number of aspects, especially matter concerning the implementation of the Aryan clause.⁹⁸

When Bonhoeffer began to work on the Bethel Confession, he was optimistic and believed that the theological work that he and his colleagues had started would make a difference. Bethge describes that “The ground work had been laid, the atmosphere was expectant, and Bonhoeffer and Strasse had a clear assignment when they began their work in Bethel. Their intention was to produce something usable and widely accepted by the time the national synod met at the beginning of September. They set to work on 15 August.”⁹⁹ A week later, Bonhoeffer wrote a letter to his grandmother, Julie Bonhoeffer, discussing his hopes and fears concerning the task at hand,

Our work here gives us much pleasure, but also much trouble. We want to make the German Christians declare their intentions. Whether we shall succeed or not I rather doubt. For even now if they officially make concessions in their formulations, the pressure they are placed under is so powerful that sooner or later all promises are bound to be broken. It is becoming increasingly clear to me that we’re going to get a big, popular national church whose nature cannot any longer be reconciled with Christianity and that we must be prepared to enter upon

⁹⁷ Bethge explains that “At the meeting of the Young Reformation movements on 24-25 July Martin Niemöller played a pivotal role in moving them toward their decision formulate a binding confession...Bonhoeffer (the youngest discussing the question) and Hermann Sasse were instructed to go on a retreat in Bethel during August to write a first draft...At Bodelschwingh’s behest—and this meant on behalf of the entire German church—George Merz, Wilhelm Vischer, and eventually others were to join them. Bodelschwingh would sign the resulting document, which would be presented to theological authorities throughout the entire German Evangelical Church.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 298.

⁹⁸ Bethge explains that “They had made a number of reformulations: in the doctrine of justification, to unmask Ludwig Müller’s trite reduction of Christianity to trust God and being good fellows; in the doctrine of the cross, so as to pillory the reinterpretation of the cross as a symbol of a Nazi slogan “public interest before self-interest” by Friedrich Weineke, the German Christian chaplain to the Prussian court; and finally in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, from a Christological standpoint, with renewed emphasis on the filioque clause, so as to guard against the dangerous emphasis...put on the revelation of creation, and to refute its consequences in Stapel’s independent notion of the law of race.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 302.

⁹⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 301.

entirely new paths which we will have to tread. The question really is: Germanism or Christianity. The sooner the conflict comes out into the open, the better. Nothing is more dangerous than concealing this.¹⁰⁰

Bonhoeffer's assessment of the situation proved to be correct, and, unfortunately, the majority within the Protestant church would choose Germanism in the months and years to come. Ten days after they began their work at Bethel, Bonhoeffer and his colleagues had completed the first draft of the Bethel Confession. About 25 August 1933 the authors of the first draft handed in their work. Bonhoeffer was initially pleased with the work, especially with section on the Jewish Question by Wilhem Vischer who Bonhoeffer had collaborated with during the ten days.¹⁰¹

One of the key issues that the Jewish section of the confession rejected was the idea of Germanic church. The Bethel Confession initially stated that "The place of the Old Testament people of the covenant was not taken by another nation, but by the Christian church, called out and living among many nations"¹⁰² In other words, the Christian church is not limited to Aryans, and there is no basis whatsoever for an Aryan based church. The Bethel Confession also states that, "We oppose the attempt to deprive the German Evangelical Church of its promise by the attempt to change it into a national church of Christians of Aryan descent."¹⁰³ Another key issue that the original Bethel Confession attempted to address was that the Christian community is not defined by race. The Bethel Confession initially stated that, "The community of those who belong to the church is not determined by blood and therefore not by race, but by the Holy Spirit and

¹⁰⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Julie Bonhoeffer, 20 July 1933," in *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 442.

¹⁰¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 402.

¹⁰² "Original Version of the Bethel Confession Concerning the Jewish Question," in *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelley and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 143.

¹⁰³ "Original Version of the Bethel Confession Concerning the Jewish Question," 143.

baptism”¹⁰⁴ Bonhoeffer and his fellow contributors had clearly opposed the attempts of the German Christian in this original draft of the Confession, especially in regards to the Aryan clause and the Jewish question, but troubles were still to come.

In Bonhoeffer’s view, a period of compromise began soon after the first draft was completed, during which their text was altered to such an extent that he ultimately refused to work on the final edition.”¹⁰⁵ This was particularly true of Vischer’s section on the Jewish question,¹⁰⁶ which in Bonhoeffer’s opinion was the most vital. He “felt that the most important parts of the confession had been watered down.”¹⁰⁷ In the final version that was published the whole argument was compressed into one sentence, which states, “Gentile Christians can no more—i.e. than the church from its responsibility for mission to the Jews—separate themselves from Christians than from the people of Israel.”¹⁰⁸ All emphasis on Gentile Christians going out of their way to stand up for Jewish Christian, even if persecution was the price to be paid was removed. In addition to the section on the Jewish question being changed, the section concerning the relationship between the church and the state was also affected. The section on the state included laudatory additions about willingly embracing the state’s aims.¹⁰⁹ Bonhoeffer could not accept these changes and would refuse to sign the final draft of the Bethel Confession,

¹⁰⁴ “Original Version of the Bethel Confession Concerning the Jewish Question,” 143.

¹⁰⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 303.

¹⁰⁶ The Bethel Confession initially stated that “The way in which the Jewish Christian has a special position in the church which is not based on any legal ruling in itself makes him a living memorial to God’s faithfulness within the church and is a sign that the barrier between Jew and Gentile has been broken down and that faith in Christ may not be perverted into a national religion or a racially determined Christianity. It is the task of Christians who come from the Gentile world to expose themselves to persecution rather than to surrender, willingly or unwillingly, even in one single respect, their brotherhood with Jewish Christians in the church, founded on Word and Sacrament.” See “Original Version of the Bethel Confession Concerning the Jewish Question,” 144.

¹⁰⁷ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 303.

¹⁰⁸ K. D. Schmidt ed., *Die Bekenntnisse und grundsätzlichen Äusserungen zur Kirchenfrage des Jahres 1933* (Göttenburg 1934), 128, in *The Churches and the Third Reich: Preliminary History and Time of Illusions, 1918-1934*, Vol. 1, trans. John Bowden. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 458.

¹⁰⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 303.

especially with the section on the Aryan clause and the Jewish question so dramatically altered.

The reaction of Bonhoeffer to the final draft of the Bethel Confession demonstrates the difference between him and the liberal theology of his day. As previously noted, Bonhoeffer had expressed that he had become theologically homeless, and his decision not to acquiesce to the changes of the Bethel confession prove this. In addition, just as he had avoided involvement with and abhorred ultra-right wing politics in the past, he was in no uncertain terms willing to make concessions regarding the Aryan clause in order to appease those with ultra-nationalistic impulses in regards to the Aryan clause. As the time in Bethel was drawing to a close, Bonhoeffer decided that he would leave Germany and go to London, as “Dean Erich Seeberg gave him a leave of absence from the university.”¹¹⁰ At the same time, his colleagues in Berlin were not able to stop the German Christian advances in Berlin.¹¹¹ With the passing of the Aryan clause within Berlin, the direction that the Prussian general synod would take in September seemed apparent. Although Bonhoeffer was planning on leaving Germany for London in October, he remained involved in the struggle against the Aryan clause throughout the months of September.

The Struggle against the Aryan clause in September 1933

The month of September was a pivotal time in Bonhoeffer’s struggle against the Aryan clause and its implementation in the German Protestant church. The month of September was key as the both the Prussian general synod and the national synod held

¹¹⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 304.

¹¹¹ Bethge explains that, “Things became worse: Jacobi and his supporters were unable to prevent the synod from adopting the state’s Aryan legislation to apply to the church’s civil service in Berlin. This was the storm warning for the approaching general synod.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 304.

church elections and the result of those elections had direct bearing on the implementation of the Aryan clause within the church. As well, September 1933 was when the birth of Pastor's Emergency League was born in response to the issues affecting the church. During the month Bonhoeffer continued his effort to confront the anti-Semitic attitude within Germany during his attendance at the Sofia ecumenical conference.

Bonhoeffer's efforts in September in 1933 were especially linked to a work he finished a month before entitled *Appeal to the Ministers of the Old Prussian Union, The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis*. In this short pamphlet Bonhoeffer hoped to raise awareness of the issues facing the church in regards to the Jewish Christians who would be affected by the Aryan clause in 1933 before the meeting of the Prussian general synod. Bethge comments that "As compared with the April thesis on the Jewish question, it addressed the new issues that had arisen in the meantime: the argument that the "ethnic national order came from God; the argument stressing the evangelistic opportunities among millions of fellow citizens that would be created by the exclusion of a few hundred Christians."¹¹²

The reason that Bonhoeffer wrote this short treatise prior to various synod elections in awareness was to raise awareness concerning the potential effects of the Aryan clause in the German church after the July elections.¹¹³ In the first portion of his treatise Bonhoeffer asserts that the Aryan paragraph creates a *status confessionis* for the church and that the church needs to become proactive in addressing this concern. As well the church needs to focus on the spiritual implications of the Aryan clause as opposed to

¹¹² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 305

¹¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Appeal to the Ministers of the Old Prussian Union, The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 6, ed. Eberhard Bethge (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1974), 272-273.

focusing on the potential material losses.¹¹⁴ Bonhoeffer then goes to set forth the results if Jewish Christians were excluded from church. The first result would be that the church would be separated along racial lines which would create a legalistic church that would be in contrary to the Gospel.¹¹⁵ The second result would be that the rite of baptism would lose its meaning as the prerequisite for entrance into the Christian community and would become virtually meaningless.¹¹⁶

Bonhoeffer then goes on to discuss whether or not an Aryan clause would be acceptable to the church. He challenges the uninterested attitude of many of the clergy and clearly states that pastors are not state employees. Bonhoeffer then argues that ministerial requirements have nothing to do with race, but with characteristics and attributes stemming from a Christian life and education.¹¹⁷ Similarly Bonhoeffer challenges the theological argument that Jewish-Christian pastor be removed for sake of the spiritually weak in Germany, so that the weak in faith would not be hindered from coming into the church.¹¹⁸ This provides another example of Bonhoeffer protesting the theology being produced from German liberalism of his day, and his departure from his theological roots. Bonhoeffer continues by suggesting that no pastor concerned with the

¹¹⁴ Bonhoeffer explains that "The Aryan paragraph in the form contained in the first program of the German Christians, is a *status confessionis* for the Church. Nothing is more dangerous than for us to allow ourselves to hoodwinked by statements as to its relative harmlessness. The constantly repeated effort to begot the question relative to it, is intended to keep us from seeing clearly the fact, by the very substance of which the Church is endangered, and thus wrest out of our hands the decisions for which we are responsible to the Church alone. Do not let us be deceived by all sorts of material considerations about the significance or insignificance of the matter, and lose sight of its spiritual substance which demands a spiritual decision." See Bonhoeffer, "Appeal to the Ministers of the Old Prussian Union, The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis," 273.

¹¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, "Appeal to the Ministers of the Old Prussian Union, The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis," 273.

¹¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, "Appeal to the Ministers of the Old Prussian Union, The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis," 273.

¹¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, "Appeal to the Ministers of the Old Prussian Union, The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis," 274.

¹¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, "Appeal to the Ministers of the Old Prussian Union, The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis," 274.

true nature of the church and Christianity would want to hold office when he or she would know that Jewish Christians pastor were being removed from office.¹¹⁹

Although the possibility of imposing an interdict had already been rejected, Bonhoeffer seems to be suggesting that pastors that valued the substance of the church need to become involved in some sort of concrete action to protest the measures that the state wished to impose upon the church. Bonhoeffer then moved to conclude his short work by noting that a church that was willing to compromise so much would not be endowed with God's grace and provision, even if a few remain faithful to the truth. Bonhoeffer concludes, "On a Church whose substance, whose essential nature has been violated, the blessings of God can no longer rest—despite the honest and best intentions of individual members. May we here make a clear decision, responsible only to the Church of Christ!"¹²⁰

Ultimately, Bonhoeffer's short essay was not successful in causing the opponents of the German Christians to rally behind the Jewish issue as the problem of primary importance. His concern for the Jewish Christians was a reflection of his own conviction, and not the convictions of his own church.¹²¹ Too many were willing to look away and remain silent or strongly believed that expelling Jewish Christians from the ministry would ultimately lead many Aryan Germans back to the church. The unfortunate reality was that the more prevalent view within the church at the time was found in the opinion

¹¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Appeal to the Ministers of the Old Prussian Union, The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis," 274.

¹²⁰ Bonhoeffer, "Appeal to the Ministers of the Old Prussian Union, The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis," 274.

¹²¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 306.

that “The church must therefore demand that its Christians of Jewish descent stay away from the ministry.”¹²²

September 1933 was important as both the provincial synods and the national synods met in order to accomplish church business. By this time the Young Reformation movement had been practically fizzled out, but on the horizon was the birth of the Pastor’s Emergency League.¹²³ The Pastors’ Emergency League was formed in response to the events of the Prussian general synod that became known as the “brown synod” due to the number of delegates that attended the meetings in their brown S.A. uniforms.¹²⁴

On 5 September 1933, the Prussian general synod convened and the result was that the general superintendents were replaced with ten bishops that would answer to Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller. As well, the clergy needed to be of Aryan descent and needed to be loyal to the state.¹²⁵ The only opposition that was provided by the general superintendents was that they desired to allow those non-Aryans that were already in ministry to remain, while accepting that any new candidates must be of Aryan descent. Bethge explains that “The general superintendents voted against dismissing non-Aryan or those married to non-Aryans who were already in office, yet they voted that such persons would not be eligible for employment in the future.”¹²⁶

Bonhoeffer responded to the result of the synod by suggesting that the church needed to take definite action. Bonhoeffer joined with others that opposed the German Christians on the evening after the synod and the following day to discuss options for

¹²² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 306.

¹²³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 304.

¹²⁴ Bethge writes, “The crisis reached its climax and turning point in September. This was not work of the national synod at the end of August; it was brought about at the beginning of September by the Prussian general synod, known as the “brown synod.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 304.

¹²⁵ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 307.

¹²⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 307.

how to respond to the events that had transpired. Both Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt believed that the next step should be mass resignations by those that opposed the German Christians, as the German Christians had by their decrees divided the church along racial lines.¹²⁷ Bonhoeffer was not satisfied that those Jewish Christian clergy that were already ordained would be able to remain in the ministry. He believed that this sort of compromise was only a way of masking the issue, and that forcefully attacking the fact that the German Christian had divided the church along racial lines was the best option.¹²⁸

Although Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt sought to move their colleagues in this direction, they did not succeed. Bethge explains that “neither at Jacob’s home on Achenbackstrasse nor at Niemöller’s on Cecilienallee did Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt win support for their view. It was too difficult for even this group to link the step toward a church schism with the anti-Semitic problem, since there were only eleven pastors in Prussia who would be affected by the Aryan clause.”¹²⁹ The final result was that the opposition decided to wait until after the National Synod to act, while Hildebrandt refused to act as a minister under the new regulations. Bonhoeffer decided to try and win new support for his position in the academic and ecumenical realms.¹³⁰ On 5 September 1933, Bonhoeffer wrote to Henry Louis Henriod, the Director of the World Alliance, stating:

¹²⁷ Bethge writes that “Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt made an impassioned plea for widespread resignations from office. They believed that, with the Aryan clause, the other side had brought about a schism of the realm to which they all belonged. All that remained was to recognize that fact.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 307.

¹²⁸ Bonhoeffer also realized that “the exceptions that had been made (which would have applied to Hildebrandt) only obscured the issue. The best service that could be rendered to the other side was to take their schismatic decision in earnest.” See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 307.

¹²⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 307.

¹³⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 308.

General Assembly finished. All General superintendents dismissed. Only Teutonic Christian admitted to national synod. Aryan clause is now in action, please work out memorandum against this and inform press at once. Separation at hand. Further information in Sofia.¹³¹

The telegram was brief and provided Bonhoeffer's sense of the situation after the Brown synod. Bonhoeffer did not stop informing his ecumenical colleagues, but pressured them in person during the Sofia conference later on in the month to attempt to censure the German church for its actions. The more immediate response for Bonhoeffer was his involvement in formulating the document that led to the birth of the Pastors' Emergency League.

Although those that opposed the German Christians had as a group decided to wait until after the national synod to consider any drastic measures against the German Christians, the immediate effect of the "Brown Synod" was the birth of the Pastor's Emergency League. The Pastor's Emergency League with "its celebrated four points of commitment, grew out of a protest of church government, drafted and signed by Bonhoeffer and Niemöller."¹³² Eventually the "three points drawn up by Bonhoeffer and Niemöller on 7 September needed only the addition of the promise to aid those affected by the new law or forcible measures; this would complete the four points of the Pastor's Emergency League pledge."¹³³ The result was that "On 12 September Niemöller called upon the German clergy to protest and commit themselves: (1) to a new allegiance to the scriptures and confessions, (2) to resist infringement of these, (3) to give financial help to those affected by the law or by violence, and (4) to reject the Aryan clause."¹³⁴

¹³¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "A Telegram to Henry Louis Henriad, 5 September 1933," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 308.

¹³² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 309.

¹³³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 310.

¹³⁴ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 310.

After formulating the document for the basis of the Pastors' Emergency League, Bonhoeffer contacted Karl Barth hoping to receive Barth's guidance and approval for action against the Protestant church. Bonhoeffer's letter to Barth begins with Bonhoeffer asking whether or not those that objected to the Aryan clause should remain in the church.¹³⁵ Bonhoeffer then indicates that he along with his associates have drawn up a declaration that states that due to the acceptance of the Aryan clause the church of the Old Prussian Union is no longer part of the church of Christ. Bonhoeffer then mentions to Barth that the point of the document is to see if those that signed are removed from the church or if they will be left alone.¹³⁶ As well Bonhoeffer mentions that the idea of Free Church has been discussed.¹³⁷ Bonhoeffer then comments that unlike Luther who was expelled because of the Roman Catholic procedures for dealing with heretics, the present day church would not be able to do so because they have no sense of what heresy is.¹³⁸ This comment clearly shows how much Bonhoeffer had come to view his contemporary liberal theological heritage with a great deal of distaste. Bonhoeffer's final concern in the letter is that Barth might suggest that Bonhoeffer and his associates wait until they are thrown out of the church, instead of precipitating their own removal. Bonhoeffer

¹³⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl Barth, 9 September 1933," in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Fontana Library, 1970; Fontana Library, 1971), 226.

¹³⁶ Bonhoeffer writes, "We have in the first place drawn up a declaration in which we wish to inform the church authorities that, with the Aryan clauses, the Evangelical Church of the old Prussian Union has cut itself off from the church of Christ. We want to wait for the answer to it, i.e. to see whether the signatories will be dismissed from their posts or whether they will say something of the sort unmolested." See Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl Barth, 9 September 1933," 226.

¹³⁷ Bonhoeffer writes, "Several of us are now very drawn to the idea of the Free Church." See Bonhoeffer, "A Letter to Karl Barth, 9 September 1933," in *No Rusty Swords*, 226.

¹³⁸ Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl Barth, 9 September 1933," 226.

admonishes Barth to remember that Jewish Christians were already being mistreated and that a *status confessionis* had clearly been already reached.¹³⁹

Barth replied to Bonhoeffer's letter as soon as he received it. Barth cautioned Bonhoeffer in some respects, while supporting him in others. First, while pointing out that Jewish Christians could still be members of the church, Barth agreed that the expulsion of Jewish pastors had created a *status confessionis*.¹⁴⁰ Barth also agreed that the protest against the church that accepted the Aryan clause must be made time and again until the church reversed its position or those that were protesting were expelled.¹⁴¹ Barth cautioned Bonhoeffer that the expulsion needed to be initiated from the other side.¹⁴² The difference between Barth and Bonhoeffer is displayed here. Although both saw the acceptance of Aryan clause by the church as a *status confessionis*, Barth recommended a more moderate course of resisting within the church, while Bonhoeffer was willing to be much more radical and was willing to fight against the Aryan clause from outside the established and state sponsored church. This varying of viewpoint shows that while Bonhoeffer valued Barth's advice, he remained independent of Barth, and would continue to pursue his own path in protesting the Aryan clause.

The original response to the formation of the Pastor's Emergency League was phenomenal. Bethge describes that "The response exceeded all expectations. It was not long before the first twenty-two signatories of the appeal distributed the protest in Wittenberg in the name of two thousand pastors. By the end of the year membership in

¹³⁹ Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Karl Barth, 9 September 1933," 226-227.

¹⁴⁰ Karl Barth, "Karl Barth to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 11 September 1933," in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936 from the Collected Works*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, translated by John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965; Fontana Library, 1970; Fontana Library, 1971), 227.

¹⁴¹ Karl Barth, "Karl Barth to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 11 September 1933," 228.

¹⁴² Karl Barth, "Karl Barth to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 11 September 1933," 228.

the Pastors' Emergency League had risen to six thousand."¹⁴³ Although the Pastors' Emergency League was well under way, for Bonhoeffer another opportunity to protest his own church's decision to accept the Aryan clause was quickly provided by the Sofia ecumenical council.¹⁴⁴

The Sofia conference was opportune for Bonhoeffer as it gave him an international forum to raise concerns about the racial measures that were being enacted within the German church. Bonhoeffer later wrote about his ability to discuss the situation caused by the acceptance of the Aryan clause in a letter to Friedrich Siegmund-Schultz. He recalled that "On this occasion, I spoke very frankly about the Jewish question, the Aryan clause in our church, and the general synod and about the question of the future of the minority as well, and met with a great deal of understanding."¹⁴⁵ As well, Henry L. Henriod, the president of the World Alliance, recorded in his diary Bonhoeffer's position. Henriod wrote that:

In Sofia, Bonhoeffer was able to inform us in a private group...about the real situation in Germany and of the brutal and intransigent attitude of the German Christians. We are instructed to tell his friends:

1. that they can count on our sympathy and support
2. that in principle it would be necessary for a delegation to decide whether the churches are able to recognize the new German church.¹⁴⁶

It is clear that Henriod viewed the situation as serious and that he was prepared to act on the issue. The issue of the Jewish question was also raised in the sessions of the Sofia

¹⁴³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 310.

¹⁴⁴ Bethge writes, Bonhoeffer attended a World Alliance conference in "Sofia, Bulgaria, from 15 to 30 September, [and it] was the only scheduled ecumenical conference that Bonhoeffer attended during the hectic days of 1933. For him the moment was opportune." See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 311.

¹⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, 6 November 1933," 314.

¹⁴⁶ H. L. Henroid, "Communication to Eberhard Bethge from H. L. Henriod, 29 March 1958," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 315.

conference, and Bonhoeffer was able to work on a resolution that was produced. The section relating the Jewish question states,

We especially deplore the fact that the State measures against the Jews in Germany have had such and affect on public opinion that in some circles the Jewish race is considered a race of inferior status. We protest against the resolution of the Prussian General Synod and other Synods which apply the Aryan clause of the State to the Church, putting serious disabilities upon ministers and church who by chance of birth are non-Aryan, which we believe to be a denial of the explicit teaching and spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁷

This statement strongly condemns the actions of those that had implemented the Aryan clause within the church. While the World Alliance clearly supported Bonhoeffer's view of the situation, the effect upon the church within Germany was minimal, as the international pressure that Bonhoeffer hoped would materialize upon the Protestant church never came about. Another concern that was raised was the potential effect of the statement in regards to the National Socialist government within Germany. After the statement was formulated, Bonhoeffer and his fellow delegate, Julius Richter, "went to the German Embassy in Sofia to assure them that German government was not being attacked."¹⁴⁸ This shows that Bonhoeffer's protest of the Aryan clause at this point was still directed towards the church, and not yet pointed directly at the National Socialist government.

Bonhoeffer's earlier work within the ecumenical world laid the foundation for the opportunity to orchestrate a protest through the leaders of the World Alliance against the implementation of the Aryan clause within the Protestant church within Germany. The ecumenical world provided Bonhoeffer with an avenue with which to protest the Aryan clause, and its declaration was pointed and direct. Unlike many of Bonhoeffer's efforts

¹⁴⁷ "Minutes (duplicated), Sofia, 12f.," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 315.

¹⁴⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 316.

within Germany, the ecumenical council was able to make a clear statement of protest against the Aryan clause. This small victory would soon be overshadowed by the effects of the National Synod within Germany.

Bonhoeffer left the Sofia conference early in order to attend the national synod in Wittenburg. Interestingly, the international response to the earlier general synod did have one effect on the National Synod, as the Foreign Ministry pressed that no discussion of Aryan clause was to occur.¹⁴⁹ Another force impacting the decision at the time was that of the newly formed Pastor's Emergency League. Bethge explains that "the Emergency League's manifesto, 'To the National Synod,' had been signed by two thousand people. Various church councils had requested expert opinions on the Aryan clause from faculties and individual academics"¹⁵⁰ The overall result of the National Synod was that the Reich Bishop, Ludwig Müller was elected. Any discussion of the Aryan clause was deliberately avoided. The lack of any serious discussion concerning the Aryan clause caused Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt to be deeply disappointed. Bethge describes that

Both regarded the outcome of Wittenburg as disastrous—precisely because nothing unpredictable had happened. The much-needed protest by the still intact regional churches outside the Old Prussian Union Church, especially those in Southern Germany had failed to occur... While nothing immediately heretical had been decided, the most crucial issue had been bypassed. Practically speaking, the performance in Wittenburg had confirmed the brown synod and the decisions of that synod remained in effect.¹⁵¹

The result of the synod was that Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt had to explore the options that remained open to them. Initially, they moved to consider whether or not forming a church completely separate from the state was an option. Bethge explains that

¹⁴⁹ Bethge writes, "After the devastating international repercussion of the brown synod, the Foreign Ministry intervened on political grounds. It forbade the discussion of the Aryan clause in Wittenburg and hence its enactment by the national synod." See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 318.

¹⁵⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 318.

¹⁵¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 320.

“Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt now considered the need for the free church. On Sunday, 1 October, they went to the Old Lutherans on Nassauische in Berlin-Wilmersdorph to assess the possibilities. Though the façade was swathed in a flowing swastika flag, they were warmly welcomed; they were told, however, that they must bring their congregations with them. This was naturally no solution. The idea of a ‘free church’ remained a burning issue until the Barmen synod altered the situation.”¹⁵² The reality was that since the majority of voters within the church were not concerned with the Aryan clause, it was not realistic to expect that the majority of church voters would vote to form a free church over the matter.

For Bonhoeffer the month of September had seen him continue to fight a losing battle against the implementation of the Aryan clause within his own church. Although the Pastors’ Emergency League continued to gain support in the next few months, Bonhoeffer decided to press on with his plans to go to London, although the new church leadership was hesitant to let such an outspoken opponent go abroad. In a letter to Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze that Bonhoeffer discussed his role in the Sofia conference, he tells of his own beliefs about the decision to let him go to London. Bonhoeffer writes that

No doubt what finally persuaded them to ask me to go to London was the fear that the congregations here would break away. I then arranged that my conversation with the Reich bishop be put in the records so that I could have an absolutely free hand and did need in any way to see myself as an emissary of a German Christian church—quite the opposite, in fact.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 320.

¹⁵³ Bonhoeffer, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, 6 November 1933”, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 321.

It is interesting to note how Bonhoeffer refers to his church at this time as a German Christian church, which indicates that Bonhoeffer had no real wish to be affiliated with the church in its present situation.

Bonhoeffer even had a different attitude than his colleagues in the Pastors' Emergency League before he was to leave for England. Many of the members, including Martin Niemöller, approved of Hitler removing Germany from the League of Nations, a move that both Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt found to be disturbing and one that would make war one step nearer.¹⁵⁴ On 16 October 1933 Bonhoeffer left Germany to become a pastor in London, England. Although Bonhoeffer's struggle against the German Christian and the National Socialists and their implementation of the Aryan clause did not cease after his departure, his main objections and action against the Aryan clause had been made by this time. Although unsuccessful, Bonhoeffer had struggled mightily against the Aryan clause as his life experiences had equipped him to do.

Conclusion

Although the Aryan clauses were accepted by the Protestant church by September 1933, the preceding has shown that Bonhoeffer clearly and decisively rejected the Aryan clause and its implementation within the church. The Aryan clause was introduced by right-wing ultra-nationalists and anti-Semites that Bonhoeffer had never supported. The various influences and experiences that effected Bonhoeffer before 1933 had provided him the ability to protest the new law and its implementation in the Protestant church.

¹⁵⁴ Julius Rieger, who was able to meet his future colleague in the "Pilsen" restaurant near the Berlin Zoo, noted in his diary a remark of Bonhoeffer's which at the time seemed to him to be exaggerated: "This had brought the danger of war very much closer." See Julius Reiger, "Communication to Eberhard Bethge from Julius Rieger," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 323.

Most important was that his family and his friends were directly threatened by the Aryan clause, which would not allow him to ignore the issue.

Bonhoeffer's willingness to stand up for Jewish Christians during this time period was also rooted in his past work of working with those that were different from him. Bonhoeffer had seen the evils of a racially divided church in Harlem and he had no desire to see his own church accept a similar division. The ability to act on such conviction stemmed out of the socio-political awareness that Bonhoeffer had been introduced to at Union Theological Seminary. With these experiences in his past it is no wonder that he protested the Aryan clause so strongly throughout 1933.

In addition, Bonhoeffer held a concept of the church that transcended the prevailing view of an Aryan German Protestant Church. He rejected the thinking behind such a church by refuting concepts like the "orders of creation" and the idea of removing the non-Aryans for the sake of the Aryans within and without the church. His more universal view of the church would be seen in his ecumenical efforts at Sofia. As well, Bonhoeffer was moving beyond his own theological tradition by fully accepting the Old Testament as the Word of God.

Overall, Bonhoeffer's protest of the Aryan clause was rooted in previous influences and experiences. Although he was not able to prevent the Protestant church from implementing the Aryan clause, Bonhoeffer did not surrender. For Bonhoeffer the path to protest would continue to be travelled and the failures of 1933 would only strengthen his resolve in the struggle against the National Socialists and the German Christians in the years to come.

CONCLUSION

Through his life experiences Bonhoeffer was enabled to reject the Aryan clause in 1933. These life experiences were rooted in Bonhoeffer's family life, his university years, his year in America, and in his vocational work in the years preceding the rise of National Socialism and the introduction of *The Law for the Re-establishment of the Professional Civil Service*. These four epochs contained the key influences and situations that empowered Bonhoeffer to resist the implementation of the Aryan clause, especially its implementation within the Protestant Church within Germany.

Bonhoeffer's early life was centred upon his family. Karl Bonhoeffer set a positive example of doing humanitarian work with troubled people, and passed onto his children the necessity of standing beside the weak. This influence was evident when Bonhoeffer purposefully stood beside those that were affected by the Aryan clause, especially his efforts during the summer elections and with the formation of the Pastors' Emergency League. Paula Bonhoeffer instilled in her son the need to think independently that influenced him as he protested the Aryan clause during the early months of the church struggle, which was a topic that most people viewed as secondary or unimportant. The high ethical standards Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer attempted to pass onto their children were evident, especially when Dietrich Bonhoeffer protested the interference of the Gestapo in 1933 during the July church election, even to the point of having the head of the Gestapo subtly point out that he could be sent to a concentration camp for his position.

The Bonhoeffer family did not support radical political groups, especially on the political right. Bonhoeffer expressed his own dislike for right wing groups and his aversion to active politics throughout his student years. It was only after his return from America that Bonhoeffer became more politically minded, as he focused his attentions on the church's political relationship to the state and began to address political concerns in his sermons. The rise of Adolf Hitler to Chancellor was seen negatively by the entire Bonhoeffer family and they did not support his hyper-nationalistic and anti-Semitic ideology.

One example of the Bonhoeffer's family courage in this regards was when Julie Bonhoeffer, at the age of ninety-one, marched past the S.A. cordon to shop at a Jewish owned shop during the 1 April 1933 boycott. Bonhoeffer protested the National Socialist government during this period of his life by resisting their initiatives within the church. Such resistance included his radio address that warned against the cult of the Führer, his initial rejection of the Aryan clause in his essay *The Church and the Jewish Question*, his work opposing the state's interference in the church (especially during the July 1933 election), and through his ecumenical ties at the Sofia conference.

Due to the close familial connections and close friendships that were affected by the National Socialist anti-Semitic views and legislation it is no wonder that the Bonhoeffers were not anti-Semitic. Karl Bonhoeffer worked with Jews and had Jewish assistants. Paula Bonhoeffer vehemently denied being anti-Semitic. As well, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his sibling lived in a neighbourhood with a high Jewish population as reflected in their high school in which forty percent of the students were Jewish. The fact that the Bonhoeffer family was not anti-Semitic was further illustrated by Sabine

Bonhoeffer's marriage to a Christianized Jew. As well, the Bonhoeffer family had close friends, such as Annelise Schnurmann and Franz Hildebrandt that would be affected by the rise of National Socialism. Both Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt worked exceptionally hard to prevent the Aryan clause from affecting the Protestant church in Germany.

Although the Aryan clause threatened Hildebrandt's future in the church due to his Jewish heritage, Bonhoeffer chose to stand in solidarity with his friend on this issue.

Bonhoeffer's family experience was the foundational basis for his rejection of the Aryan clause in 1933. The high ethical standard that was based upon a humanitarian concern for standing by the weak combined with the lack of support for radical right wing ideology and a lack of anti-Semitic bias in providing Bonhoeffer a strong basis for his protest of the Aryan clause in 1933.

Bonhoeffer's university years were also key to providing him with a number of experiences that would lay the foundation for his rejection of the Aryan clause. His experience with the Igel and the brief resulting military experience were not based on any right wing or radical political impulses, which further emphasizes the political stance that Bonhoeffer inherited from his family. The Igel experience also resulted in his resignation from the fraternity when they accepted National Socialist initiatives; this shows Bonhoeffer's intolerance for any group that acquiesced to the Nazis.

Another aspect of Bonhoeffer's student years was his trip to Rome. In Rome he was confronted with the majesty of Roman Catholicism and he began to think through the limitations of his own Protestant background. The willingness to reflect critically upon his own church continued in the years to come and was a defining trait in Bonhoeffer's resistance to the Aryan clause. It was also during the Roman trip that Bonhoeffer noticed

and commented on the social conditions that surrounded him, especially during the brief days that he was in Africa. This social awareness developed in the years to come, and was an important aspect in Bonhoeffer's protest in 1933 when he realized the detrimental effects of the Aryan clause. As well, Bonhoeffer's interaction with Barth's theology during his college years caused Bonhoeffer to rethink his Liberal theological heritage. Although Bonhoeffer did not become a Barthian, he found himself in a position of theological independence in the years to come. Although Bonhoeffer was independent from the pro-National Socialist liberalism that was espoused by Paul Althaus and Emmanuel Hirsch, he was also independent from Liberal theologians that did not support the National Socialists and chose not to make the Aryan clause a central issue. Bonhoeffer's independence was displayed when he argued against theological concepts like "the orders of creation" and supporting the Aryan clause as a necessary basis for reaching the Aryan people.

The final formative experience from Bonhoeffer's student years was his decision to interpret the Old Testament as the Word of God. This was contrary to other competing views circulating such as removing the Old Testament as an authoritative collection of texts or to suggest that the Old Testament be retained merely as to show the progression of religious thought and life that culminated in the New Testament. The desire to remove Jewish elements from Christianity emerged with the rise of the National Socialist regime and with the gains of the German Christians in the Protestant Church within Germany. The German Christians attempted to remove Jewish elements throughout the Protestant church and the Aryan clause provided a vehicle that directly affected the pastor of Jewish descent within the church. Bonhoeffer's willingness to retain the Old Testament as the

Word of God demonstrates his willingness to retain the Judaic heritage within Christianity. Bonhoeffer expressed this throughout his efforts against the Aryan clause in 1933, especially in his essay *The Church and the Jewish Question* and his choice of text for 28 May 1933 when he spoke on Moses and the Golden Calf. Overall, the various experiences and influences during Bonhoeffer's student years provided him with a basis for his actions in the years to come.

Bonhoeffer's time in America provided him with a number of experiences that caused him to protest the Aryan clause. His introduction to the social theology at Union Theological Seminary caused him to realize the need for theology and the church to address important social and political issues. This was seen in his ministry when he returned to Germany, especially in 1933. Bonhoeffer's social and political awareness was apparent in his radio address, his essay *The Church and the Jewish Question*, his attempts to thwart the German Christian actions during the summer of 1933, throughout the Brown and National Synods, and in his efforts concerning the Pastors' Emergency League.

Another important aspect of Bonhoeffer's time in America was his first hand experience of the racial divide that existed within the churches of America. Through his friendship with Frank Fischer and through his own ministry in Harlem Bonhoeffer witnessed the oppression of the African-Americans. When the Aryan clause was introduced within Germany, Bonhoeffer expressed his reservations about having a racially divided Protestant church in Germany. This was expressed most clearly in *The Church and the Jewish Question*, in his treatise, *Appeal to the Ministers of the Old Prussian Union*, the initial work on the Bethel Confession, and his throughout his efforts to resist the advance of the German Christians in the various church elections.

The final crucial aspect of Bonhoeffer's time in America was his friendship with Jean Lasserre. Through this friendship Bonhoeffer had to overcome his own nationalistic feelings to become friends with the Frenchman. The other result of this friendship was that Bonhoeffer was confronted with the ideas of pacifism and was introduced to the ideas surrounding the ecumenical work in Europe. Although Bonhoeffer never fully embraced pacifism, he did agree with the principle of having the churches working together to avoid another world war. The result was Bonhoeffer's involvement in the ecumenical organization, the World Alliance, upon his return to Germany. This involvement caused Bonhoeffer to come into disagreement with the work of nationalistic liberal theologians, Paul Althaus and Emmanuel Hirsch, which were against the ecumenical movement. Bonhoeffer rejected ideas like the "orders of creation", which were used to support conflict between nations and racial groups. At the Sofia conference in 1933 Bonhoeffer was able to persuade the World Alliance to issue a statement condemning the Protestant church's acceptance of the Aryan clause.

When Bonhoeffer returned to Germany in 1933 he entered into his academic, ministerial and ecumenical work. Within the academic realm Bonhoeffer developed a strong relationship with Barth, and this relationship caused Bonhoeffer to become more theologically independent as he saw himself as neither a Barthian nor a liberal theologian. This independence was seen with his firm stand against the Aryan clause when many others were focusing solely on the ecclesiastical struggle during 1933. As well his essay on "What is the Church?" expressed his concerns about the Protestant church becoming involved in party politics, which would in the end destroy the church. This fear was

realized in 1933 as the German Christians worked to gain ecclesiastical control of the church and implemented the Aryan clause.

These academic influences were augmented by his ministerial experience that saw him work with others much different from himself. His work with the Wedding confirmation class and his work with the Charlottenburg youth club saw Bonhoeffer giving himself to those that were very different from himself. This new found social concern was expressed in Bonhoeffer's sermons, as he began to demonstrate his increasing social and political awareness from the pulpit. This socio-political concern also caused him in 1933 to reject the Aryan clause and stand up for those that were different from him.

Finally, Bonhoeffer's ecumenical efforts caused him reach out to the international world when much of Germany was heading towards hyper-nationalism, and was another point of conflict with the nationalistic liberalism of his day. Bonhoeffer's rejection of the "orders of creation", which was being used to justify racial and nationalistic aims, foreshadowed his efforts to reject those that would attempt to implement the Aryan clause in 1933. Bonhoeffer's ecumenical efforts were rewarded with the statement issued by the World Alliance during the Sofia conference condemning the acceptance of the Aryan clause by the Protestant church within Germany.

All of Bonhoeffer's experiences set him on the path the led him to protest the Aryan clause in 1933. His essays, his efforts against the German Christians during the various ecclesiastical elections, and his work at the ecumenical conference at Sofia were rooted in his character that had been developed by the time the Aryan clause was introduced by the National Socialists. Although his efforts were not successful,

Bonhoeffer can be remembered as one of the few within the German Protestant church that protested the Aryan clause from the very outset of the German church struggle.

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